

# READING FOR PLEASURE

AND OTHER ESSAYS

BY

R. ELLIS ROBERTS



METHUEN & CO. LTD.  
36 ESSEX STREET WC  
LONDON

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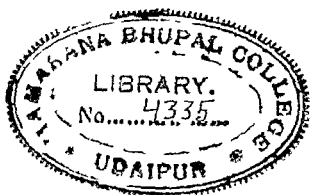
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## NOTE

SOME of these essays have appeared in various periodicals—the *Observer*, the *Daily News*, the *Weekly Westminster*, the *New Statesman*, the *Bookman*, the *Empire Review*, the *Guardian*: all have been revised, and most rewritten and enlarged. I have to thank the editors concerned for the hospitality which they have given to these notes of a book-lover.

R. E. R.

*August, 1928*

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## Reading for Pleasure



IS the intelligent reader becoming scarcer? The question will not surprise anyone who is acquainted with the popular weekly and monthly papers, and with the reading of the majority of working people in town and country. I am not too old to remember farmers in the West of England whose libraries, though small and often rather odd, contained no rubbish—Milton, Bunyan, Nelson's *Fasts and Feasts*, *Gulliver's Travels*, some books of Baxter's, *The Holy Call*, some Waverley Novels, perhaps some older books, such as White's *Selborne* or Walton's *Lives and his Angler* comprised a library which only a hasty fool would despise. The culture got from such a selection of books—to which you could always add the Holy Bible—was sound, expressed in good English, clear, and swift in either defence or attack. The appeal of such a literature, however limited it might seem, was æsthetic and intellectual—it had no more of ease than art should have, and often gave you an appetite for further reading on sound and classical lines.

To-day? Well, I have no doubt one may find farmers and farm workers still sensitive to literature, not long ago I lent a labourer, who had fallen sick, Melville and that excellent modern whaling story, *She Blows!* and his appreciation was positive and sincere. But he was over sixty years old. I find, both in the town and the country, a lamentable readiness to fall back on the Sunday paper, preferably

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some beastly thing with pictures—papers which combine the maximum of vulgarity with the minimum of sense

I must write cautiously when I write about the cinema and its products, for I am aware of a prejudice. I have no doubt that the educational film—films taken by the natural historian, or even the film which attempts to reconstruct history—has its great value in a community which is most easily approached through the visual imagination. But this reliance on the visual imagination has, in time, a very bad effect on the intellect. Our thinking is done for us. Our comments are made for us. Our minds are made up for us. Our opinions are assumed. There is nothing to challenge thought or inquiry or intelligence in the average 'movie'. You can attend a 'picture theatre' with a degree of stupidity which would make you lose your thread in reading the most popular of papers. The effect of the film is quick. It surprises. Its entertainment is as sudden as it is obvious. It has no subtlety and no shadow, and when a genius, such as Charlie Chaplin, tries to introduce either, one sits back and longs that he would come to the legitimate stage.

That conviction is, I am sure, right. Anything which tends to reduce the part played by the mind in art is a retrograde, dangerous tendency. We have come with difficulty and danger out of a world where all impressions were immediate sense-impressions; to return to it is to guarantee disaster. And we are in danger of returning to this primitive, unconditional, unrational state, not only in such crude matters as the cinematograph, but in more difficult and less

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direct matters. Our literary criticism, for instance, has passed from the analytical to the expressive. Men of ability make pictures where they used to pass judgment. They are enticed by the pride of the eye, and pay little attention to anything but the pattern. The meaning is ignored or subordinated. Nothing is condemned that makes a pleasant noise, a convenient pattern, or a striking colour and life is forgotten in admiration of its less philosophic expression. So I welcome with the greater pleasure such a book as Mrs. Woolf's *The Common Reader*. Here we have the old standards stated in a new manner. We have a critic of learning, of tact, of exquisite sensibility, who refuses to be misled by the mere noise and sensation of modern letters.

To read well is to read at leisure; and modern life is losing leisure. There are, now, all over the world, groups of people, large and small, to whom leisure is a variety of boredom—people who never sit and watch, who see nothing of beauty because they never look long enough at anything, and hear nothing of the world's loveliness because they are deafened with their own din. If they read at all, they read as a man with no palate eats and drinks. They bolt their books whole, neither tasting nor choosing them. And there are critics against whom a similar accusation might be made. Mrs. Woolf is at the opposite pole. For her reading is a delight, not a drag, and her writing, as its humour, its dignity and its malice—is it extravagant to say that she reminds me sometimes of Montaigne?—is a delightful expression of her pleasure. There are things in this book which no one else could have written, papers on little known



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books which Mrs Woolf has picked up in old circulating libraries. The beginning of the essay on *The Lives of the Obscure* will give a good idea of Mrs Woolf's skill in setting a scene :

Five shillings, perhaps, will secure a life subscription to this faded, out-of-date, obsolete library, which, with a little help from the rates, is chiefly subsidised from the shelves of clergymen's widows, and country gentlemen inheriting more books than their wives like to dust. In the middle of the wide airy room, with windows that look to the sea and let in the shouts of men crying pilchards for sale on the cobbled street below, a row of vases stands, in which specimens of the local flowers droop, each with its name inscribed beneath. The elderly, the marooned, the bored, drift from newspaper to newspaper, or sit holding their heads over back numbers of *The Illustrated London News* and the *Wesleyan Chronicle*. No one has spoken aloud here since the room was opened in 1854. The obscure sleep on the walls, slouching against each other as if they were too drowsy to stand upright. Their backs are flaking off, their titles often vanished. Why disturb their sleep? Why re-open those peaceful graves, the librarian seems to ask, peering over his spectacles, and resenting the duty, which indeed has become laborious, of retrieving from among those nameless tombstones Nos 1763, 1080, and 600.

Never in this book do we get that dry, dusty and essentially futile criticism which separates the work from the author. Mrs Woolf is keenly alive to the reaction between life and literature, and perhaps the most enjoyable papers in the volume will be thought by some to be those which give character sketches of the less-known authors. The essay on Margaret, Duchess of Newcastle, is a model. The early part of the essay called *The Pastons and Chaucer* makes the dull life and dull letters of the Paston family glow with

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gold and colour, as if they were the figures in one of their own books of hours or missals Mrs. Woolf catches life for us. Here we have Richard Lovell Edgeworth eccentric, presented, revived, in a few pages, here we have Lætitia Pilkington, Mary Russell Mitford, Dr. Bentley. In her inimitable account of the last Mrs Woolf is severe, but not too severe, truly the scholars of Bentley's time were odd men—when 'to mend a line was to break a friendship'. James Gronovius of Leyden—'homunculus eruditione mediocris, ingenio nullo', as Bentley called him—attacked Bentley for ten years because Bentley had succeeded in correcting a fragment of Callimachus where he had failed Bentley himself, records Mrs Woolf, 'condescended, though the subject in dispute was the Greek Testament, to call his antagonist "maggot", "vermin", "gnawing rat", and "cabbage head" to refer to the darkness of his complexion, and to insinuate that his wits were crazed, which charge he supported by dwelling on the fact that his brother, a clergyman, wore a beard to his girdle'

While Mrs Woolf is easily ahead of any of her contemporaries in this power of vivacious portraiture, she is also an acute critic of æsthetic, with a firm and convinced theory of her own In a brief note—called *The Patron and the Crocus*—she disposes neatly and sufficiently of the modern nonsense which regards the artist as self-sustained, needing no audience

But who, then, is the desirable man—the patron who will capote the best out of the writer's brain and bring to birth the most varied and vigorous progeny of which he is capable? Different ages have answered the question differently Tho

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Mrs Woolf's more analytic essays—on Montaigne, on Chaucer, on Greek, on the Russian point of view, on the modern essay and the modern novel—discuss the importance of this vital relationship. For it must often happen that readers find in the books they love something quite other than what the author intended them to find. We cannot be sure that we hear in Homer what the poet heard and his first eager audiences, we have seen recently what a strange visage may be put on so familiar a book as the Old Testament, and we have no idea whether Septuagint, Vulgate, Authorized Version or Mr Moffat's translation comes nearest to giving us the sensation which the first reader got from the book. Even in modern times, as Mrs Woolf points out, we cannot be positive that we have really caught the true meaning of the great Russian novelists. We live in a world where all the contact between one mind and another is only approximate, and we cannot be too grateful for those who, as does Mrs Woolf, make the contact closer and truer between us and the great or merely entertaining figures of the past.

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nor between conventions which it is more trouble to flout than to follow, and the fashion which it is more troublesome and more expensive to follow than to flout. He ignores also the fact that many men are so convinced of the hopelessly unaesthetic quality of men's clothes and their own persons that they do still regard clothes merely as a protection against the undesired attentions of the weather and the police. Yet we read his article on clothes with interest and a slight enjoyment, not because of what he tells us about clothes and men, but because of what he tells us about Mr. Arnold Bennett. We file his confession for future reference when we are criticizing the novelist's general outlook on life.

He has expressed that outlook, again in a book with a betraying title—*The Savour of Life*. No one has a better appetite for good things, and for things that are not quite so good, as Mr. Bennett, and no one can express a disgustful reaction with a more definite gesture, a more expectorating finality, than he. Do you seek to urge upon him that, while the Russian novelists are, you agree, of a great splendour, yet there are English novelists, novelists to whom the great Russians were proud to admit their debt, for whom they showed their admiration—for instance, Charles Dickens? Mr. Bennett orders the head-waiter to bring him some Dickens—he looks at the specimen, he takes a fork, he toys with a piece, and then comes the sentence:

Various admirers of Dickens have persuaded me at one time or another to begin some twenty novels of Dickens, none of which I have ever been able to finish.

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Take them away! Back to Bortsch! (Incidentally, I should like to know what admirer of Dickens found twenty novels of that author, only fifteen, if we interpret most generously the word novel, are known to the ordinary reader.) Similarly, Mr. Bennett, casually as it were and without any undue ceremony, in a note on Henry James, consisting mostly of generous denigration, remarks:

I extol him as a literary critic. He was, perhaps, the first important critic to deflate the balloon of Gustave Flaubert

—a most damning sentence—for it really does not matter what Henry James said about Flaubert, for Flaubert knew, observed, wrote about real, solid, working people, or about figures who lived in an imaginative country outside James's capacity to understand. Flaubert was a medievalist, an imaginative realist, while James lived tentatively and experienced delicately only among people who used the conveniences of life to escape its obligations. And how can we feel either pleased or displeased, impressed or oppressed by the 'I extol him' of a critic who can use, about Flaubert, such a monstrously inappropriate image as 'deflate the balloon'? That might be said of some one who depreciated Hugo, but if Flaubert is to be cast down, it needs a house-breaker, not a man with a packet of pins. No amount of critical punctures can affect the great architecture of *Salambo*, the sombre streets and guilty villas of *Madame Bovary*, the cloisters and cottages of *Trois Contes* or the aerial castle of *La Tentation de St Antoine*

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Mr Bennett's reliance on his immediate sensuous impressions of literature or life is continuously leading him astray. There are things which you cannot get by the exercise of mere appetite; they need vision, the intellectual imagination, even a delicate humility. It is not that Mr Bennett does not stop to think— all popular journalists—and he says proudly and truly that he has 'never ceased to be a journalist'—go in peril of that; but he is too comfortable in his assumption that his readers will not think either. So he allows himself such stupidities as to write of Mr Bertrand Russell, 'He frequently verges on metaphysics, which (like myself) he despises,' not remembering, or hoping that his readers will not remember, that no one can write about ultimate things at all without recourse to metaphysics. The people who say that they 'despise metaphysics' are simply those who will not take the trouble to make themselves good metaphysicians. They are really afraid of investigating the basis of their own thought.

For a man with such definite likes and dislikes of his own he remains curiously insensitive to the likes of other people. He has none of the calm assurance of the man who knows what he likes, and is not in the least discontented if other people differ from him. Mr Bennett does not seem able to conceive that his taste is not a universal standard. In a very entertaining paper in *The Scour of Life*, called *Round about Literature* he discusses the size and weight of books. He complains of the bulk of Lawrence's *Revolts in the Desert* and Churchill's book on the war (which he grossly over-estimates), and compares them with a pocket edition of Macaulay.

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Are physical strain aching wrists general anguish and feats of balancing supposed to be an aid to intellectual comprehension? Is it logical that I should be able to read Dostoevsky's masterpiece comfortably in bed while Lawrence's masterpiece and Churchill's brilliance (the one much less than half—the other less than a third of Dostoevsky) are impossible as bed books? Ought not all readable books to be readable in bed? Here are three questions. The answer to the first is No reason to the second No, to the third Yes. I will add a fourth and broader question. Are not heavy and unwieldy books a confounded nuisance? To which the answer is in the affirmative.

The method is a trifle obvious, and is persistent in all Mr Bennett's essays. He simply and blindly generalizes on personal opinion. I detest the ugly, fat volumes in which Mrs Garnett's magnificent translation of Dostoevsky appeared. When I read Tolstoy's *War and Peace* I read it for preference in the three large octavo volumes of the first edition of her translation. I like folios. I consider *Revolt in the Desert* a rather small book, and not at all too heavy, but, anyhow, I don't think weight should be considered beside dignity, comeliness and suitability. But I do not, for these reasons, clamour that there should be no small books, no pocket editions. It distresses me rather to read Gibbon in the Everyman edition or the World's Classics, but if you want to read Gibbon on a holiday, you are glad of a small edition. But I should detest a world from which elephant folio and atlas folio had disappeared, and the use of the book stand was forgotten.

Mr Bennett however, has a passion for neatness, for commodiousness. He defends the decimal system. I have no strong feelings about this or any monetary

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device, but why this passion for uniformity? Though they keep technically within the system, the French feel bound to relieve the monotony by talking in 'sous', while the Fleming is continually confusing the uninitiated by his use of 'cents' instead of 'centimes'. It is true that elementary arithmetic is made easier by a decimal system; but do we really need to have more things made easier for us? In one essay, 'Over-civilized', even Mr. Bennett begins to have doubts. By 'civilized' he means apparently dependent on different labour-saving devices, and he actually suggests that it would not be a bad thing if too dependent people tried the simple life.

The simple life is not a bit simple—it is far more complicated than our ordinary life—but it is exciting and fairly agreeable for a short time, and it has the great virtue of teaching its votaries how to be self-reliant, how to improvise and how to keep calm under physical and moral difficulties.

There you have the best Arnold Bennett—the Bennett who wrote the great light novels, those frivolities which are, I think, so grievously neglected by admirers who over-estimate his solemn essays in heavy fiction.

Of the novelist who has given us so many remembered books there are plenty of touches in his personal essays. It is the very voice of the Card we hear in the beginning of the pages on Spain. 'I can speak frankly of the Pyrenees, which are under-estimated in the popular mind', or again how firm is the sturdy voice of the Five Towns in the righteous indignation of this summary of the Spanish character. 'These



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Spaniards who care neither for the past nor for the future, and who love chiefly cigarettes, women and slothful monotony. There must be many houses in the Peninsula in which the plumbing is lamentably inefficient. Again the voice is heard in the quaint complaint against the jewels squandered by these same odd Spaniards on the robe of an image of Our Lady.

Fifteen thousand genuine pearls on the mantle of a single Madonna! And so on. Never were the principles of the author of the Sermon on the Mount more grandiosely practised by His avowed disciples.

An odd people the Spaniards, to waste on images of sacred persons that advertisement of prosperity which the normal minded English Protestant puts on the neck or the hair of his women! How the Sermon on the Mount comes in Mr Bennett does not explain. Its author, as far as we know made no protest against the golden magnificence of the Temple, or the extravagance of the services which He attended there. His recorded protest was against the admirable advertising business methods of the money changers and merchants in its outer courts.

Mr Bennett is at his best his most convincing and reasonable best, in such essays as those on *Books*, on *History in the Streets* on *Education*, on *Insomnia* on *The Big Shop*, and *Russian Fiction*. he is at his worst in such papers as that on Maupassant's *Ariel*, or *Life's Greatest Satisfaction* and on *Making Friends*. He has an uneasy cocksureness in the face of idealism, which makes him extravagant and awkward. His

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determination not to give himself away results in a rather devastating self-exposure. Yet all the time he gives one that pleasant sense—if one likes parties—of being at a party. It is an infectious frame of mind. Deeply infectious. His article on *My Religious Experiences* resulted, in consequence, in an odd kind of vision, which it would be unfair not to relate.

The scene was somewhere between the firmaments. The younger saints were busy lighting Roman candles and letting off rockets. Nobody bothered there about where the sticks might fall. The whole, it seemed, of interstellar space was brilliant with illuminations—golden rain, fiery dragons, gigantic catherine wheels. Even Michael watched the gauds with some amusement, and a few of the Powers and Dominations were helping some of the citizens who were busy with a large set piece. The clerk of the works was a little, thin, shrewd, old man, who seemed anxious that his assistance should not be mistaken for approval. 'I'll help,' he seemed to say, 'but you mustn't quote me as agreeing.' Once he was heard to murmur, 'After all, I believe we're making too much fuss. I built Him a temple once'.

Then there was a stir among the workers, as the clear, liquid notes of the golden and silver trumpets announced the Arrival. Came a long procession of Thrones, Dominations, Principalities, Powers, Virtues, Archangels and Angels; and, ringed by the unutterable blue and the deep red of the Seraphim and Cherubim, the Almighty arrived at the scene of the celebration. At his side was the Keeper of the Calendar.

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'And what,' He said to that functionary, 'are we celebrating to day?'

'All Mightiest, your children have made a gala because to day the news has come that Enoch Arnold Bennett is inclined to admit the truth of Your Existence His words are here I see plainly that there must be some Life Force—call it God, and also 'I should not object to having a religious creed I should rather like to have one A genuine creed must be a very convenient and comfortable thing M de Voltaire thought that this event demanded some recognition Mr Bennett is an author'

'Ah!' replied the serene voice, 'ah! A difficult profession We have followed it Ourselves It is disconcerting at first to find One's work under estimated and One's existence disputed by the characters to whom One has given life Then with a gracious word to Voltaire and a smile for the workmen the High Presence moved on And as it moved, Voltaire murmured, 'Well, when he does get here I know he ll enjoy the party'

## Lost in a Library o o o o o

THE Ancient and Honourable Confraternity of Convinced Curmudgeons meets in secret. Only once was I present as a guest at one of their dinners, which combine the silence of a Quaker meeting with the acerbity of a quarrelsome common room, the formality of a mess dinner, and the uncontrolled cheerfulness of a funeral party at which all the mourners assisting have been disinherited in favour of the Wisconsin Home for Grey Mice. I will not explain how I happened to be a guest; it was a thoroughly miserable and dyspeptic evening, and, as I tottered back to a lonely bed in my garret—all this happened years and years ago—I wondered about life and letters and the competitive and co-operative instincts in man. It seemed odd to gather socially in order to be separately gloomy; but then I argued that the mere aspect of one's neighbours' excessive boredom would provoke the real Curmudgeon to further efforts of determined depression, there is a kind of sad sense in the business. I have since discovered a more depressing thing even than those dinners. A man lost in a library, particularly in one's own well-known, well-loved library, is a dreadful sight. We must have all met the guest who wanders into the neatly arranged room, where gay patterns of book-covers mingle harmoniously with the colours of carpet, rug and chair, and then murmurs, 'You've a lot of books!' He seems, this guest, to have

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heard of a book, but to be a little uncertain to what use a book is put, or at least some kind of book, he seems to be only now discovering that there is other reading material in the world beside the *Spain Hebdomadal Gazette* or the *Philatelic Atelier* or *Goo goo, Gems of Girlhood* 'I suppose,' he will continue, picking up one of your rarest treasures, 'I suppose you haven't got anything I could read?' You assure him that you have *not*, and then, if you are wise, pack him into a neat parcel, secure with string mark 'Empties only', and send him for the round journey on the Inner Circle

Yet perhaps that treatment is too harsh, not altogether kind. For there are libraries in which any of us may lose ourselves. I know I should have in Lord Acton's—though I would have struggled gallantly—and there are certain economist's libraries in which I should never condescend to find myself or to be found—yet no doubt they would despise me and treat me contumeliously. There are days, however, and moods in which one can be lost in quite good, welcoming, human libraries. It is partly a question of arrangement. I got—as our Victorians say—all flummoxed once because I found the Janesist Controversy, Jorrocks and Justinian all on one shelf, and in other libraries I have been disconcerted by excessive orderliness. I soon, however, found the cure for this desolation. The man lost in a library has two things to do—one is to guess the owner's character, the other is to start an anthology. The perfect time for that is childhood. It must be an anthology not of the best things, not of all the good things, but of the things which make you feel at

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home There are certain poems and books which always give me a warm feeling, a cosy, contented glow, a sense of reasoned satisfaction with the world. And, though you may feel excited or exulted when you are lost, you cannot feel cosy or content; and, with the return of cosiness the sensation of loss will disappear I could give a long list of those books—it is not a consistent list at all. The two *Alices*, the books of *Ruth* and *Job* (but not *Ecclesiastes*), *The Holy War*, *Samson Agonistes*, *Vanity Fair*, the *Antiquary*, the *Ancient Mariner*, *Annabel Lee*, the *Babes in the Wood*, the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, Sidney's *Defence of Poetry*, *Kim*, the *Jungle Books*, the *Essays of Elia*, and the *Chronophotonthologos* There are many more; but these are enough to show that there is no rule about the kind of book which will—as the advertisements say—remove that sinking feeling

There is now, however, one book which should be in all libraries where anyone is in danger of getting lost—for it contains not merely things which make me feel at home, but everything which makes Mr de la Mare feel at home, and very few things which make any one feel lost. Its very title is an invitation to be found—*Come Hither!* *A collection of Rhymes and Poems for the Young of All Ages.* 'The young of all ages' and every one feels young when he is lost I once saw a Fellow of Balliol—but I must not tell you that story now; nor, indeed, can I, for I have picked up Mr de la Mare's book, and, having found it again, am lost to all else. *Come Hither* is not an anthology It is an adventure; a walking-tour with digressions, a song of thanksgiving with

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illustrations. It is Mr. de la Mare wandering and rejoicing in the tower of Mr Nahum Taroone, of whose discovery he writes in his introduction. For the sake of that introduction, and for the notes which Mr de la Mare gives at the end of the volume, the book would be worth its guinea. It is a beautiful book; but I wish Mr. Constable would issue an edition of three or four volumes, small enough to be slipped in the pocket. Mr. Nahum Taroone's tower contained many strange things—thunder bolts, coloured shells, a skeleton, harness, weapons, skins of birds—and it contained many books, of which the chief was that famous old work, *Theotherworld*. There were three volumes of this book, and the poems in *Come Hither* are taken mostly from Volume I:

I chose what I liked best—those that, when I read them, never failed to carry me away as if on a magic carpet, or in Seven League Boots, into a region of their own. When the nightingale sings, other birds, it is said, will sit and listen to him and I remember very well hearing a nightingale so singing on a spray in a dewy hedge, and there many small birds perched mute and quite near. The cock crows at midnight, and for miles around his kinsmen answer. The fowler whistles his decoy for the wild duck to come. So certain rhymes and poems affected my mind when I was young, and continue to do so now that I am old.

*Come Hither* cannot be criticized as if it were an ordinary selection. Mr. de la Mare does not pretend to have put into it all the best poems, or all the poems he likes, he puts into it nothing that he does not like, however good he may think it. And he must, I think, have left out many things that he does like,

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things which are magic carpets to him as to the rest of us. I think some pages of Mr. Tarroone's book must have been stuck together with damp. I am positive that there were in that first volume poems by Robert Browning, by Elizabeth Browning, by Henry Kingsley (the lovely *Magdalen*), by Newman, by James Thompson (B V), by George Macdonald, by Edward Lear, by Gerald Hopkins, by Mary Robinson Duclaux, by Fredegonde Shove and Frances Cornford. I am afraid, too, that some one, a mischievous friend, perhaps, slipped into *Theotherworlde* one or two sheets containing poems which Mr Nahum Tarroone would never have chosen, odd little, thin, modern poems more like stair-roads than magic carpets. There are not many of them, and I shall not mention them by name. They are in a wonderful company for once; and they are not likely to get much attention. Mr de la Mare arranges his book in delightful patterns. There are seventeen parts, ranging from 'Morning and May', through 'Elphin Ouph: Fay', 'Far', and 'Dance, Music and Bells', to the full and generous section 'About and Roundabout', in which Mr de la Mare tells us about the poems he has chosen, gives us others, and gives, too, lovely scraps of prose. There is humour in this book, and irony, and pity, and that sheer beauty which Mr de la Mare recognizes in unknown as well as in hackneyed things. I was glad to meet Hood's 'I remember, I remember', and several other favourites of our parents. He gives us plenty of the great classical poems, and very rightly he keeps to the old spelling when he is copying out Elizabethan verse. I like his defence of this practice of printing Shakespeare's poems 'as they



# Shreenath

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## Lost in a Library

The flea is a little worme, and greveth men mooste and  
scapeth and voideth peril with lepyng and not with runnyng,  
and waxeth slowe and fayleth with colde tyme, and in somer  
tyme it waxeth quiver and swift: and spareth not kynges.

Is the author of that Mr. Nahum Taroone?

SOMEWHERE in that large country, the United States of America, there is, rumour says, a large factory employing a large number of workmen, and supplying the needs of a large number of people. It is known as the Henry Ford Friction Manufactory—or briefly, The Ford Fract. No longer does one man, using his hands and some superficial fragment of the brain, laboriously compose that well known article of commerce, the short story. An army of expert workmen, supervised by foremen who are known as sub editors (this name is a survival from the old days of home made, hand made articles), is kept busily at work, all day and all night, in six shifts of four hours each. One group of workmen supplies the composition, another the end, another the beginning, another the local colour, another the dialogue, another—these are unskilled workmen and generally recent immigrants—supplies style, another group—these are invariably women—contribute character, and a final group designs the plots. This last group will probably soon be abolished, as Ernest Shicksummer has recently invented a machine, not unlike the well known Adder machine in its workings, which can produce, on the pressing of the button, any of the nine hundred and ninety nine variations of the world's nine plots. The Ford Fract already supplies surreptitiously many of the most popular American magazines. There has been trouble with the Authors' Society,

The Ford-Fract-Fact

## The Ford-Fict-Fact

but it is well known that in a country such as America, where freedom is the first consideration, the free shop must win, and no malicious trades union will be allowed to stand for long between the people's demand for quick, slick fiction and the Ford-Fict-Fact's desire to supply the same.

At present there is no branch of the Factory in Great Britain, but I imagine that its establishment will not be postponed for long; for Mr. Michael Joseph's 'Short Story Writing for Profit' is evidently a gallant attempt to hearten the old guard of hand-workers. I am afraid his book, though it may encourage the duller wits, does not hold out much hope for the survival of the old fashioned article. In many pregnant passages he gives away the case. For instance, he gives a list of thirty-six substitutes for 'he said' or 'she said'—he includes, I notice, 'gasped' and 'blurted', but forgets 'jerked', 'yammered' and 'straved' (Tobit X. Yuppling's ingenious 'portmanteau' word for 'strove to say'). But how can this hand-list for one moment stand against the famous Püll instrument—imported free of duty—which gives no less than one hundred and seventeen substitutes, including several in foreign languages, notably in Welsh, French and Mussolinisque?

Still, Mr. Joseph's aim is to cheer up the little band which has put its money into correspondence classes, and is looking for some return. He works really hard. He reminds them that

If the title and characters' names of, say, 'The Sire de Malétroit's Door' were changed, and the story submitted as

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an original MS to a magazine editor who happened not to have read R. L. Stevenson's famous story, I doubt very much whether it would be accepted. It is an excellent story but it does not conform to modern magazine standards. The dialogue in itself dates it and puts it out of court.

I am afraid that Mr. Joseph is right in hunting—how delicately he does it—that even still we have editors among us who have wasted their time in reading Stevenson (Stevenson, by the way, was a nineteenth century author, popular with Scotsmen and permanent officials). The fact that even to day editors may be found who are acquainted with this old rubbish is evidence how poorly they have visualized their business and its high seriousness, how a few of them still idiotically fancy that there is some connexion between the short story and literature.

That there was in a remote past a connexion of this kind, even in America, is certainly true. Swindle, the foreman of the Composition Yard of the Ford Fict Fact, before he went into the publicity business, made an investigation into the subject, and proved, to my mind and to the satisfaction of most impartial thinkers, that in origin the short story was actually a definite form of literature—a sub species, in fact, of the genus novel. A fact as unsavoury as this however, while it must be admitted by historians, need not be insisted upon. No one, looking through the modern popular magazine, would ever guess that there had been this close connexion, and I cannot help thinking it is unfortunate that Mr. Joseph should seem, even in kindness, to parley with those who would degrade us from the age of machinery.

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down to the lamentable level of the hand-made crafts. This passage is surely an unwise concession to the enemy :

Good style does not mean the language of the purist. Split infinitives, the ending of sentences with prepositions, and many other literary peccadilloes which cause the academically-minded to shudder, are honoured in the breach in fiction. It must not be thought, however, that a good style is to be deprecated.

This last sentence opens a fatal door. If once the tyro gets into his head the idea that the short story has anything to do with the arts, he will probably be lost to the magazines and their profits. In America, of course, if the Curtis-Bolcock Act passes, art will be prohibited, and will become as scarce and as expensive as whisky or wine. In England and Europe generally such a policy is unlikely to succeed ; and there is no doubt that, for the young, literature has the same fatal fascination which is exercised by alcohol, tobacco and marriage. Of these evils the first is already prohibited in the United States, the second soon will be, and the third is very generally alleviated.

Still, the whole tone of Mr. Joseph's book is right. He is evidently a whole-hearted lover of the machine-made article and anxious that his head-working clients should make the best of the clumsy means at their disposal in order to produce a plausible imitation of the factory work. It is true he does incidentally appear to regard art as having still some negotiable value, but his expressions of respect for literature are not, I trust, of any more real importance than

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the raising of his hat, as a funeral passes, by the professed disbeliever in the soul and its immortality. These polite gestures do credit to his heart, and also are perhaps not indiscreet when one remembers that in Great Britain, for whose inhabitants he is writing, the Authors' Society is still fairly strong, and needs placating. His book may be heartily recommended to all who are anxious, as Mr. Joseph says in one of his few passages of moral fervour, that the popular magazines in England should continue 'to supply the public with what they want'. How admirable is the subtle indetermination of that 'They'.

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WE all know that Mr. Kipling began his career as a journalist. Some critics have realized that he was that rare thing, a great journalist. But I do not think anyone has realized how extraordinarily he has retained the great journalist's attitude to life. That attitude, like all attitudes of any value or truth, involves an apparent contradiction and a balance of opposites. The great journalist knows that almost nothing is really important, and that almost anything is news. He knows that, just as a man forgets the contents of yesterday's paper, so the world forgets the events of last century, and he knows that something is always remembered, and that it is his business, if he wishes to be a good journalist, to learn how to 'spot' the events and the people which will be remembered. A good journalist always keeps his sense of proportion, and always appears to lose it, he must write of all news as if it were the most vital and exciting thing that has ever happened, and yet know in his heart that its interest is evanescent. Yet he must never be indifferent (cynicism is not indifference)—he must be excited about the transient, and the more deeply he believes that everything is transient the more eagerly and simply will he welcome the eternal news if it ever comes his way. The curse of the journalist is over-emphasis, adopted to impress both himself and others, his blessing is that he never suffers, as do the rest of the world, from that dreadful boredom which

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is the beginning of spiritual death. At the first symptom of accidie in his soul, the good journalist will start to analyse it, and he will make fresh news, late press news, out of the mere monotony of a repetitive universe.

How well Mr. Kipling has retained the great journalist's mind can be seen in the address he made when he was presented with the gold medal of the Royal Society of Literature in 1926. He spoke about the art of the novelist and literary fame :

All men are interested in reflections of themselves and their surroundings, whether in the pure heart of a crystal or in a muddy pool, and nearly every writer who supplies a reflection secretly desires a share of immortality for the pains he has been at in holding up the mirror—which also reflects himself. He may get his desire. Quite a dozen writers have achieved immortality in the past 2,500 years. From a bookmaker's—a real bookmaker's—point of view the odds are not attractive, but fiction is built on fiction. That is where it differs from the other arts.

Most of the arts admit the truth that it is not expedient to tell every one everything. Fiction recognizes no such bar. There is no human emotion or mood which it is forbidden to assault—there is no canon of reserve or pity that need be respected—in fiction. Why should there be? The man, after all, is not telling the truth. He is only writing fiction. While he writes it his world will extract from it just so much truth or pleasure as it requires for the moment. In time a little more, or much less, of the residue may be carried forward to the general account, and there, perhaps, diverted to ends of which the writer never dreamed.

Take a well known instance. A man of overwhelming intellect and power goes scourged through life between the dread of insanity and the wrath of his own soul warring with a brutal age. He exhausts mind, heart, and brain in that battle, he consumes himself and perishes in utter desolation. Out of all his agony remains one little book, his dreadful



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testament against his fellow kind, which to-day serves as a pleasant tale for the young under the title of *Gulliver's Travels*. That, and a faint recollection of some baby talk in some love-letters, is as much as the world has chosen to retain of Jonathan Swift, Master of Irony. Think of it! It is like turning down the glare of a volcano to light a child to bed.

There are, as there should be in good journalism, many disputable statements in this passage, for journalism is provocative, not revealing, of truth. Only a born journalist could believe and say that 'All men are interested in reflections of themselves', it is his original incentive to work, and if he did not believe it his task would be impossible. Yet it is evidently untrue, for it implies that all men have a desire to see themselves as they are, and this is false both of the savage and of certain sophisticated types. Again, what is literary immortality? Must it be universal, or continental, or merely national? Shakespeare and Dante have it in a sense in which we can not predicate it of the Lady Murasaki, of Camões or even of Sappho. Is an author more immortal if he is remembered very widely and vaguely by millions and millions of men, as Homer is, or Virgil, or if he is remembered intensely and intimately by a smaller number as are Sterne, or Pushkin, or Goldsmith, or Blake? These objections, however, are but incidental. What is important is that here Mr. Kipling exhibits the traits of the great journalist which have served to make him the most popular, the most widely-read, the best known of all living English authors who are also ranked high by the critics of literature. It is an odd accusation to make against the man who astonished us in the 'nineties by the

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*Barrack Room Ballads*, the *Plain Tales from the Hills* and the collection of army and Indian stories, but I accuse Mr Kipling first of modesty. All good journalists must be modest—they must believe, that is, that what they have to say, what they write about, is more important than themselves. There were many reasons for Mr Kipling's extreme success, but it was really his modesty, in that age, which was mainly responsible.

He began to write at a time when authors all over Europe were bitten with the heresy of art for art's sake—a doctrine which soon resolves itself into art for the artist's sake. Two great schools had given support to this thesis. There was the aesthetic school, of which the head in England was not Wilde but Walter Pater, who found almost all the interest of their material in its effect on the personality of the artist. It was his nature, his temperament, his moods, his opinions which were of supreme importance. The world experienced only had such value as was given it by the artist's reactions and reflections. Secondly, there was the school—to which in a sense much of Mr. Kipling's earlier work in prose belonged—that followed the teachings of the great French naturalists, Zola, the Goncourts, Maupassant, the early Huysmans, who professed that the art of the novelist was the art of objective recording, and these men forgot that objectivity was in itself a subjective thing—or, in the modern cant, that extraversion is only a very limited kind of introversion—and that, could he do it, the novelist who did not select at all was, by his very refusal to select, exercising a choice as personal and arbitrary as the most eclectic writer. Both

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schools, then, attached an undue value to the will and the judgment of the novelist. Now Mr. Kipling, who began writing from a mind exceptionally well stored from boyhood with many kinds of literature,<sup>1</sup> was, except in the matter of style, entirely free from literary *snobisme*. It is the secret of his popularity with men who care little for other modern books (except Mark Twain's, also very free from this weakness), engineers, travellers, business-men, sailors, and soldiers, and it is the reason why critics who can divest themselves of the fallacy<sup>2</sup> that literature and

<sup>1</sup> For Mr Kipling's reading see the passage in *Stalky and Co.*, in which he catalogues the treasures that Beetle finds in the Head's library.

<sup>2</sup> He gave Beetle the run of his brown-bound, tobacco-scented library, prohibiting nothing recommending nothing. There Beetle found a fat armchair, a silver inkstand, and unlimited pens and paper. There were scores and scores of ancient dramatists, there were Hakluyt, his voyages, French translations of Muscovite authors called Pushkin and Lermontoff, little tales of a heady and bewildering nature, interspersed with unusual songs—Peacock was that writer's name, there was Borrow's *Lorenzo*, an odd theme purporting to be a translation of something called a "Rubaiyat", which the Head said was a poem not yet come into its own, there were hundreds of volumes of verse—Crashaw; Dryden, Alexander Smith, L. B. L., Lydia Sigourney, Fletcher and a purple island, Donne, Marlowe's Faust, and—thus made M'Turk (to whom Beetle conveyed it) sheer drunk for three days—Ossian, *The Earthly Paradise*, *Atalanta in Calydon*, and Rossetti—to name only a few.

<sup>3</sup> I cannot here discuss whether art, which, in its widest sense would include the practice of religion, is or is not the most important thing to which man can apply his powers. I am inclined to believe that it is; but I am sure there is no more certain way of getting this opinion into disrepute than by taking for granted that it is self-evident, and held by the majority of mankind, even by the majority of intelligent men. The opposite is only too obvious. I am afraid there is no question that a certain sterility overcomes the work of those artists, especially if they are novelists, who thus unwisely assume the exaltation of their profession. As he grew older Henry James seems to have been almost

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the other arts are admittedly more important than any other vocations find Mr. Kipling's work some of the most tonic and delightful of our time.

In reading the bulk of Mr. Kipling's work in verse or prose two impressions are immediate and remain constant. The author is avidly curious of all aspects of life, and he has the power to see in any person or incident that unique value which does properly belong to it. In method and superficial manner his debt to Maupassant is evident in his early stories, but he has not Maupassant's deep seated infidelity. Maupassant could be at times a little sentimental and slightly romantic; but we never believe in his romance nor his sentimentalism as we do in his cynicism and his realism. For Kipling the world of Mrs. Hauksbee, of the people in *False Dawn*, of the Gadsbys, is as real as he makes it for us; but it is not more real than the world of Wee Willie Winkie, of *The Brushwood Boy*, and of *They*. Kipling's place as an imaginative reporter is greater than Maupassant's, no author since Robert Browning has had quite so great an inquisitiveness into different kinds of life, quite so great a power of finding out the facts, or quite such a genius for telling us about the things he discovers. The early critics were so charmed or terrified by the young Kipling's diabolical cleverness, by his smartness, his air of cocksureness, that they were unable to think not merely of other vocations, but of life itself, except in terms of art, and the result on his own work was disastrous. To-day, things are much worse. Even quite commonplace poets—like Mr. Drinkwater—write as if art could exist and have a meaning apart from an audience, and implicitly put the artist into a position of lofty loneliness which a reasonable philosophy can only grant to God, and in which, according to Christian theology, God Himself is not content to be.

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ignored his plain traditionalism. Really, as I said, Mr Kipling is a modest author. He had, and still has at times, a cocksure, positive manner, but actually he is much less arrogant than such an author as Stevenson. For Mr Kipling is cocksure not about what he thinks nor what he believes, but about what he has been told. He annoys many people precisely because of the breadth of his interest, and here again he resembles Browning. Many people who are too mentally and imaginatively fatigued to read Browning sweep him aside because he makes them feel small and limited. Now that Mr Kipling's smartness is not fresh, his manner no longer unfamiliar, we can ignore them, and we find, if we read his work sympathetically, that what excites and pleases us is the author's excitement and pleasure in so many different kinds of people, in so dazzling a variety of scene as this world affords. We can apply to Kipling the lines Landor wrote to Robert Browning

Since Chaucer was alive and hale,  
No man hath walk'd along our roads with step  
So active, so inquiring eye, or tongue  
So varied in discourse

This acute criticism of Browning is valuable because it recognizes the existence of a kind of artist too often confused with another class. Shakespeare, Dickens, Balzac, Tolstoy are men of great creative imagination, they do not only observe, they make—their people are often more real, that is nearer in our judgment to the truth of life, than the characters we meet. Chaucer, Browning, Kipling are not of that company. They are men of great

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invention and observant imagination. Their figures rarely—this is not true of Pompilia or the Pope in *The Ring and the Book*—have any reality greater than that of actual life, and they exist in the circumstances and conditions their creators make for them, and not outside these conditions. Take one of Mr. Kipling's best and most heartrending stories, *The Record of Badalia Herodsfoot*. Badalia is dreadfully, poignantly alive. She is solid and three-dimensional. Mr. Kipling knows her every action, almost her every thought and aspiration, and can show them to us with a precision which not even Maupassant could excel. Badalia, Tom and Jenny are as vivid as an author of genius can make them. How the speech of the 'second comforter' expresses the whole life of a woman in slumland, if she lives with a blackguard :

'Let 'er go an' dig for her bloomin' self. A man wears 'isself out to 'is bones shovin' meat down their mouths, while they sit at 'ome easy all day, an' the very fust time, mark you, you 'as a bit of a difference, an' very proper too for a man as is a man, she ups an' 'as you out into the street, callin' you Gawd knows what all. What's the good o' that, I arx you?'

It is the best story of slum-life in English, and it set a fashion both in England and America. Yet, if you turn from these three consummately drawn people, with every action and gesture right, to Charles Dickens' Bill Sikes and Nancy you are aware that you have passed into a higher realm of reality. Kipling's people are the more accurate, the more credible, far less tied to their creators' writing table, but yet Bill and Nancy are more

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real While Badalia, Jenny and Tom are three-dimensional, Bill Sikes and Nancy and even the bull-terrier are four-dimensional. They exist outside the conditions of the story called *Oliver Twist*. They are free, and not determined. They are more 'types' than Mr. Kipling's people, and yet they are more individuals just because they are more typical. In the last part of Mr. Shaw's *Back to Methuselah*, Pygmalion makes two automata who are as human as human beings of to-day, though the people of A.D. 31730 believe they are only dolls. They are consummately made, completely perfect, beautiful, splendid, and are indeed alive, they move and speak and feel. Then one of the Ancients touches them, and faintly into them flows the stream of that higher life after which it is man's destiny to strive. There is the difference between the works of the creative imagination and the inventive imagination. The creatures of the creative imagination may be clumsier, more ill-shaped, absurder, less life-like than those of the inventive imagination, but they belong to a higher realm of reality. This distinction is to be found in all the arts—it is even clearer in painting perhaps than in literature—it separates Holbein from Rembrandt, Manet from Van Gogh, Hals from Velasquez, Raphael from Michael Angelo. It is not, let me insist again, that the creatures of the inventive imagination do not live, but they live on another level.

And on that level how alive they are, and what enormous pleasure they can give us. I am sorry for those who cannot appreciate the great company of artists whose work has this proximate reality.

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Sometimes their sheer craft is so great that their work passes into the other kind—D'Artagnan sometimes, I think, goes riding with Falstaff, and I believe Mr. Pickwick watched, a little shocked perhaps, as a certain police stretcher was pushed through the night and dawn to Brook Green, Hammersmith. But I neither understand nor respect the aesthetic Puritanism which will not allow us to enjoy any art which has not an immediate symbolic value. All the world's literatures contain specimens of the pure story-teller's art, and the man who is indifferent to the suggestion of the village fire, or the road to Canterbury, or that low room in which Scheherazade night after night postponed her death sentence, seems to me to have mistaken his vocation if he writes or, indeed, concerns himself about literature. There is, I believe, a moral and intellectual cowardice in his attitude. For the supreme story-tellers, if they do not give us life as it is lived in the secret places of the heart, as it is in the dreams of the emancipated spirit, give us something inalienable and irreplaceable. They give us the spectacle of life. They give to those of us who cannot, through circumstance or character, have those adventures of the body and mind by the enduring of which man has learnt to desire the adventures of the imagination and the soul, a chance of experiencing what those pioneers experienced. To refuse to listen to them is to try to skip a step in our mental development. The man who despises those hazards which belong to the characters in the art of invention is never fit for those higher and more perilous hazards for the sake of which he pretends to belittle the others. Finally, if



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we are deaf to the cry of 'Let's pretend!' and 'Once upon a time,' we are refusing to listen to an appeal on the response to which depended the very existence of that other art we profess so to value

Of Mr Kipling's supremacy in the story of invention I do not think there can be any question. Even Mr Bennett's virtuosity, even Mr Wells' intelligence seem a shade too careful, too considered beside Mr Kipling's cool, unhurried, fool proof ease and skill. How diverse and diverting a collection it is from *Plain Tales from the Hills* to *Debits and Credits*. There are, of course, in that mass of work trivial and unworthy things, but no living author can show so large a body of fiction kept on so high a level of craftsmanship, so original in handling, so sincere in its limits, so definitely true to the author's mind and plan. All of Mr Kipling's knowledge, strength, wit, imagination, passion and fancy go into each story. We may at times think that in any of these qualities Mr Kipling is not what we wish, but he never scamps nor shirks. There are things he does not know—he does not write about them. There are opinions we dislike or even detest; but they are his own opinions. He never fakes his facts, and if his facts do not always lead him to the truth, he is there in common case with the rest of human kind. It is not possible to say in which tales the normal genius of Mr Kipling is most obvious; there are too many which are so completely satisfying that they could not be altered without damage. 'The Finest Story in the World' is perhaps one in which may be seen at their highest the many and various aspects of his talent, but a critic would choose something less

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ambitious if he wished to expatiate on the direct force of Mr. Kipling's genius. Wonderful as are *Many Intentions* and *Life's Handicap*, I am not sure that it is not in *The Day's Work* that one can find the stories which display at its height the normal Kipling. 'William the Conqueror' and 'The Tomb of his Ancestors' have a mature mastery which it is difficult to match. If we add to these 'Without Benefit of Clergy' from *Life's Handicap*, 'An Habitation Enforced' from *Actions and Reactions*, we have then, I think, the tales by which an anthologist would represent Kipling's gift at its most characteristic. The end of 'An Habitation Enforced' expresses perfectly the conflict in Mr. Kipling's own temperament, the ache for the old and traditional, the passion for the quick and the new.

A few months later the three of them were down at the brook in Gale Anstey woods to consider the rebuilding of a footbridge carried away by spring floods. George Lashmar wanted all the bluebells on God's earth that day to eat, and Sophie adored him in a voice like to the cooing of a dove, so business was delayed.

'Here's the place,' said his father at last among the water forget-me-nots. 'But where the deuce are the larch poles, Cloke? I told you to have them down here ready.'

'We'll get 'em down if you say so,' Cloke answered, with a thrust of the underlip they both knew.

'But I did say so. What on earth have you brought that timber tug here for? We aren't building a railway bridge. Why, in America, half a dozen two by four bits would be ample.'

'I don't know nothin' about that,' said Cloke. 'An' I've nothin' to say against larch—if you want to make a temp'ry job of it. I ain't ere to tell you what isn't so, sir, an' you can't say I ever come creepin' up on you, or tryin' to lead you farther in than you set out—'

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A year ago George would have danced with impatience. Now he scraped a little mud off his old gaiters with his spud, and waited.

'All I say is that you can put up larch and make a temp'ry job of it, and by the time the young master's married it'll have to be done again. Now, I've brought down a couple of as sweet six by-eight oak timbers as we've ever drawn. You put 'em in an' it's off your mind for good an' all. T'other way—I don't say it ain't right, I'm only just sayin' what I think—but t'other way, he'll no sooner be married than we'll 'ave it all to do again. You've no call to regard my words, but you can't get out of *that*.'

'No,' said George after a pause, 'I've been realizing that for some time. Make it oak then, we can't get out of it.'

Then there is the other Kipling. Some among the great artists of invention and imagination never seem aware of that other kingdom in which they are not masters. There is no hint in Dumas or in Rubens of a desire for any other world than that which they can control and so magnificently present. They are content that their art should be perfect, unheeding apparently the truth that perfection is something less as well as something more than human. Others—Chaucer is a notable instance—by sheer style carry us into that other country. Browning reached it in some poems by a power of sympathy as strong and more usual than the creative imagination of Keats or of Shelley. In his way, though one would not put him on a level with those poets, a similar event overcomes Mr. Kipling. If I may misapply the last sentence of 'The Brushwood Boy', it will stand as Mr. Kipling's question to himself as he records the spectacle of life. 'But—what shall I do when I see you in the light?' His question to himself is, 'What shall I do when I see you in my dreams, in

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the night?' Very early the problem haunted him, often in grim and uncomfortable forms that resulted in stories of horror unequalled outside Poe, but often, especially in his later work, in stories of beauty and longing and a tender reverence which are not the less lovely for his boyishness of spirit. A great journalist, Mr. Kipling knows that there are countries the journalist cannot enter—that is the last lesson of journalism and is very rarely learnt, and so, when he is taken there by his spirit of love and curiosity, he abandons the journalist's method, even if he sometimes keeps the manner. He has stated his own attitude in a poem which is unfairly neglected by those who acclaim him as a party verse-maker and a defender of the West against the East. Long before, in a brief chapter heading in *The Naulahka*, he had shown that he had, above most men, 'two different sides to his head'. It was no ignorant applause of the Sahib who wrote the damaging quatrain:

Now, it is not good for the Christian's health to hustle the  
Aryan brown,  
For the Christian riles, and the Aryan smiles, and he weareth  
the Christian down,  
And the end of the fight is a tombstone white, with the name  
of the late deceased,  
And the epitaph dears. 'A fool lies here who tried to hustle  
the East'

And it is the same spirit which is alive in that challenging lyric 'The Fairies' Siege', of which I quote the last verse.

I'd not give way for an Emperor,  
I'd hold my road for a King—

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To the Triple Crown I would not bow down—  
But this is a different thing  
I'll not fight with the Powers of the Air,  
Sentry, pass him through!  
Drawbridge let fall, 'tis the Lord of us all,  
The Dreamer whose dreams come true!

It is that Kipling who wrote a few poems of exquisite loveliness, certain stories of the beyond, and those strange tales of a further reality which force us to reconsider a classification which puts Kipling with those authors for whom the visible world and its inhabitants most supremely exist. 'The Brushwood Boy', 'The Miracle of Purun Bhagat', most of 'Kim', 'Wireless', 'In the Same Boat', 'The Finest Story in the World', and 'They'—all these stories take me, at least, into the fourth dimension, so does most of the two *Jungle Books*, and at least one of Mr Kipling's stupendous comedies 'The Village that Voted the Earth was Flat', though it has in it a rather detestable taint of cruelty, is comedy of a kind which has not been written since Dickens. It has obvious affinities with that side of Mr Wells' genius which gave us *Kipps* and *Mr. Polly*; it might be compared to some of Mr. Bennett's fantastic effects, but it has an unearthliness, a proper Aristophanic, Rabelaisian quality which we cannot find in any other modern author, and hardly again in Mr Kipling. But of all the stories of his in which he opens a door rather than shows a view from the window, one of the most affecting and one of the most neglected is to be found in his last volume *Debits and Credits*. There is not a little of Mr. Kipling's work which shows how well acquainted he

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is with the men and manners of past time. In *Rewards and Fairies*, in *Puck of Pook's Hill*, I feel, not that he has read about the remote days of the Roman occupation, nor of the days of Elizabeth, but that he has been there and comes back to tell us of them. So in 'The Eye of Allah' he writes with an ease which Miss Waddell might envy of the lore and the science of the Middle Ages. He is a supreme interviewer, for he asks his questions with that degree of sympathetic imagination which makes an answer inevitably right. And this gift, which in his youth he applied chiefly to the men and women of to-day, he has in later days exercised on the men and women of the past. In 'The Eye of Allah' the talk of the monks about medicine and science and art has a tang that brings the men back to their cloisters; and the final speech of the Abbot has, in brief, the same wry wisdom which Mr Shaw found in the mediæval scholastics who condemned St. Joan. In the same terms, for the same reason, the Abbot smashes the microscope and pronounces it idolatry.

He unscrewed the metal cylinder, laid it on the table, and with the dagger's hilt smashed some crystal to sparkling dust, which he swept into a scooped hand and cast behind the hearth. 'It would seem' he said, 'the choice lies between two sins. To deny the world a Light which is under our hand, or to enlighten the world before her time. What you have seen, I saw long since among the physicians of Cairo. And I know what doctrine they drew from it. Hast thou dreamed, Thomas? I also—with fuller knowledge. But this birth, my sons, is untimely. It will be but the mother of more death, more torture, more division, and greater darkness in this dark age. Therefore, I, who know both my world and

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the Church, take this Choice on my conscience. Go! It is finished.'

He thrust the wooden part of the compass deep among the beech logs till all was burned.

But it is not this story which is the gem of that last volume. The primacy rests with 'the tale of 1916' called 'On the Gate'. It is a tale of the invasion of heaven by those who fell on the field of battle. All the characters are supernatural beings, or the souls of the great dead now in paradise, or the souls of the recently slain. I know no modern story in any language, not even in Russian, in which sacred and deeply moving things are handled at once with such daring and such reverence. I know no story in which Mr. Kipling's deep, underlying pity, so often obscured by his cleverness of manner, is so well employed. The guardians of the gate are overworked and call in others to help against the angels of the pit who strive for the souls of the dead at the very bar of heaven. The extra pickets include Joan of Arc, Charles Bradlaugh, John Bunyan, John Calvin, Judas Iscariot and William Shakespeare. Only a long quotation can do justice to the force and vision of the great scene of struggle:

Meantime, a sunken-eyed Scots officer, utterly lost to the riot around, was being button holed by a person of reverend aspect who explained to him that, by the logic of his own ancestral creed, not only was the Highlander irrevocably damned, but that his damnation had been predetermined before Earth was made.

'It's unanswerable—just unanswerable,' said the young man sorrowfully. 'I'll be with ye.' He was moving off, when a smallish figure interposed, not without dignity.

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'Monsieur,' it said, 'would it be of any comfort to you to know that *I* am—I was—John Calvin?' At this the reverend one cursed and swore like the lost Soul he was, while the Highlander turned to discuss with Calvin, pacing towards The Gate, some alterations in the fabric of a work of fiction called the *Institution*.

Others were not so easily held. A certain Woman, with loosened hair, bare arms, flashing eyes, and dancing feet, shepherded her knot of waverers, hoarse and exhausted. When the taunt broke out against her from the opposing line 'Tell 'em what you were! Tell 'em if you dare!' she answered unflinchingly, as did Judas, who worming through the crowd like an Armenian carpet-vendor, peddled his shame aloud that it might give strength to others.

'Yes' he would cry, 'I am everything they say but if I'm here it must be a mortal cert for you gents. This way, please. Many mansions, gentlemen! Go ood ballets! Don't you notice these low people, Sar. Plees keep hope, gentlemen!'

When there were cases that cried to him from the ground—poor souls who could not stick it but had found their way out with a rifle and a boot lace—he would tell them of his own end, till he made them contemptuous enough to rise up and curse him. Here St. Luke's imperturbable bedside manner backed and strengthened the others' almost too oriental flux of words.

In this fashion and step by step, all the day's Convoy were piloted past that danger point where the Lower Establishment are, for reasons not given us allowed to ply their trade. The pickets dropped to the rear, relaxed, and compared notes.

I suppose the conventionally orthodox may be disturbed at Mr. Kipling's vision of the other world, it is not the mythology of the Middle Ages, for here Judas is out of hell and with a bold return to the eschatology of Origen and the earlier Christian tradition, there is hope for the 'Lower Establishment.' I shall not be surprised if in the years to



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come this story may not be one of the greatest influences towards popularizing the modern idea of the meaning of eternity. The eternity of hell is not a matter of duration but of intensity, hell can be entered in this life, and its pains are eternal—that is, they have the same blazing quality of reality as the happiness of heaven. They touch all that is permanent and indestructible in the soul of man. And, just because they do that, they cannot be everlasting unless and except any soul insists for ever in remaining obdurate to all the pleadings of God within and without. 'On the Gate' has a wider scope, a deeper beauty than any one of Mr. Kipling's stories of the other world, and in it he justifies all his previous essays, whether in prose or verse, to snatch for a moment the veil from actual things and show to us the reality that alone supports and informs them.

## Can We Read Shakespeare ?



ALMOST any house that has any books has one. Often it looks more like a box of chocolates than a book, and when one opens it one does it rapidly, blinking at the maze of dreadful print. Other copies are legibly printed, but so heavy and cumbrous that the volume is more often used as an addition to a piano stool than as an aid to an amusing evening. I am not sure that to connect this volume with the idea of amusement is not, in some houses, regarded as rather profane. The book is always referred to as 'Shakespeare.' That is, is it not, the final glory of an author? We talk of other great men's books by the books' titles—*Vanity Fair*, *The Canterbury Tales*, *The Faerie Queen*, *Don Quixote*, or *Don Juan*. But no constructor of sentences to be rendered into foreign languages would hesitate to write 'Will you kindly give me a Homer, a Lucid, a Shakespeare, a Bradshaw?' The author and his writings are one and indivisible. Are they read? Am I alone in England in having the courage, or the impudence, to admit that there are plays of Shakespeare's I have never read through? And may never read through? 'A Comedy of Errors' is one, and I have found myself bogged in the three parts of 'Henry VI.' A friend of mine once said bitterly that the highbrows did not recognize how much rubble and brickbats there were in many of Shakespeare's plays, and though we may believe that, as

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the critics tell us, other hands deposited a good deal of the rubble—still, there it is

Frankly, I do not believe that half the people who own 'Shakespeare' ever dream of reading him. They dust him. They admire him. They say if questioned 'Oo—Shakespeare—Oo—he's different!' They wouldn't be without him any more than they would be without curtains in the windows or an efficient plumbing system—but they don't read him.

A great many of them can't. They find his language old-fashioned, his ranting bombast mere fury and wind, his humour coarse and rustic, his philosophy either too easy or too obscure, his people confusing and confused, his stories incredible, and his attitude to life excessively morbid and unpleasant. Now they are taught to regard these traits as bad in modern literature. The Lord Chamberlain, in his wisdom, recently refused to licence a play of Mr. Eugene O'Neill's because there is in it a suggestion of incest. What would that official do if 'Hamlet' came up for judgment? If Mr. Noel Coward wrote 'Measure for Measure' what a fuss there would be about Claudio's decadence and the brutal sensuality of Angelo! If Mr. D. H. Lawrence dared write anything as violently oversexed as 'Antony and Cleopatra', or as madly unreasonable as 'Othello', how he would be scolded! And so people who don't like morbid subjects or unpleasant people simply can't and don't read Shakespeare. At least I suppose they don't, because they never hint in their conversation that they find anything unpleasant in the works of our greatest dramatist, and surely the unpleasantness leaps to the eye.

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There is another possible explanation. Can it be that some people read Shakespeare as others read the Holy Bible ? Read the plays with a superstitious reverence, accept them as a mere traditional fetish, something which has passed beyond the need of being understood and can be read by rote ? For such readers the passion and horror of ' Othello ' or ' Macbeth ', dimmed by a slightly obsolete language and decorated by sublime poetry, have no actual meaning, no immediate significance. They can read the terrible and immortal things without paying the slightest attention to the reality that is illustrated, just as they can say, ' He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble and meek. He hath filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He hath sent empty away,' without paying any particular heed to what those words mean.

Shakespeare has become for such people a figure in a stained glass window, unreal, unsubstantial, harmless. In these latter years we have seen many attempts to strike Shakespeare the man out of his window. Mr Frank Harris tried, but never persuaded me that Shakespeare was so like Mr Frank Harris as that eccentric and able critic believed. Other gentlemen, whom I need not name, are so disgusted with Shakespeare that they are busy trying to substitute anyone else—Bacon, the Earl of Oxford (minus Asquith), Raleigh, and, for all I know, Gassendi, Roger Bacon, Luther, and Pope Alexander VI. But, after all, Shakespeare the poet and dramatist is far more important than Shakespeare the man. I do not much care whether we learn the truth about Shakespeare's private life, but I do care if people

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go on wasting money and time in the adulation of a 'Shakespeare' whose literary value is scarcely more than that of an aspidistra

For an intelligent reading of Shakespeare's plays most of us need a good critical edition, some knowledge of Elizabethan literature and life, some idea, that is, of the influences which made the plays what they are. Now there are good books about Shakespeare's plays, and excellent editions. There is that edited by 'Q' and Mr. Dover Wilson, there is the admirable 'Arden'; there is the monumental Variorum. All editors are human, and there are lapses and gaps in most editions of the classics; we are now getting a little bolder with our handling of the great, and Mr. G. B. Harrison and Mr. F. H. Pritchard, in their New Reader's Shakespeare, have made another effort to popularize the plays. The editors have disregarded the usual scene headings and stage directions (mostly the work of editors in the age of Queen Anne), and have 'given a setting to the plays in the manner of the greatest modern dramatists'. This is a bold and ambiguous claim. The only modern dramatist mentioned by the editors is Mr. Shaw, who favours the extremely full and explanatory stage direction. He is not alone in this, but there are many modern dramatists who favour far briefer directions. Ibsen, Tchekov, Tolstoy, are all comparatively old fashioned, Barrie turns his plays into stones with dialogue, and insinuates rather than expounds. Pirandello and Eugene O'Neill follow Mr. Shaw at a distance and with a difference. It is obviously legitimate for an editor of Shakespeare's works to disregard the old directions if he will; and

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something might be gained if a man of genius wrote into Shakespeare's plays directions so full that 'the reader has a full and vivid idea of the characters who are about to speak before he begins to read the play'. That, Mr Harrison says, is what he has tried to do; but I am afraid I should never have guessed it from his edition of 'Henry V' and 'Twelfth Night'. Take, for instance, the opening of 'Henry V'. The first act begins with a discussion between the Bishop of Ely and the Archbishop of Canterbury. Mr. Harrison writes a note that tells us what they are discussing—which is sufficiently obvious from the text—but he tells us nothing about the prelates, not even their names. It may be said that these are minor characters. Well, turn to the first appearance of Henry V, a character of great importance. All we get is this:

Henry V, now in the prime of manhood, is seated in council with his chief nobles, Gloucester, Bedford, Exeter, Warwick and Westmorland. He is anxious for war with France, for his title to the throne is insecure, and he hopes, by repeating the triumphs of his great grandfather, Edward III, to divert the attention of his subjects

'The Modern Method' may, as Mr. Harrison claims, 'give the reader a full and vivid idea of the character', but it is plain that this note gives no idea of Henry V's character at all, and we are left to gather it, as of old, from his great speech to the French ambassadors. Again, when one of the best-concerned persons in the play comes on—Fluellen—all Mr. Harrison has to say is, 'He is a very valiant Welshman of great experience in the wars, a keen

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disciplinarian, and a mighty fighter. Welsh, however, being his native tongue, he has some little difficulty with English speech.' The last fact is evident from Fluellen's first long speech, which also proves him a man of experience; and his desire for discipline is plain from his first action and first words when he urges on Pistol and Nym. Mr. Harrison's claim seemed even odder when I examined 'Twelfth Night'. That play opens, as every schoolboy knows, with Orsino's melancholy speech: 'If music be the food of love, play on.' Now it might be useful—certainly it would be to the amateur actor or reader—to be given some idea of Orsino's character. Is he a Sentimentalist? Idealist? Imaginative? Passionate? An Idler? Mr. Harrison tells us nothing except that 'since he first saw the Countess Olivia he has been brooding on thoughts of love', a remark which does not distinguish him greatly from any other man smitten suddenly with the lovely pain of love at first sight. Mr. Harrison's failure is not altogether to be deplored. Indeed, success was hardly possible, for, if he had given us swift, acute little etchings of the principal personages, most lovers of Shakespeare would have insisted that to make such likenesses was really an outrage. There is an excuse for making a photograph of *The Last Judgment* or *Las Meninas*, to give those who may never be able to see the originals some faint idea of the power and beauty of the paintings; but this is a needless process with literature. Nor can you make Shakespeare more popular or more intelligible by attempting to simplify him. The greatness of him largely consists in the fact that it is possible for equally

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intelligent people to have entirely discrepant views about the characters in the plays. We discuss and quarrel over Henry V, or Falstaff, or Hamlet, or Claudio, as we quarrel over the people we meet in the world. There perhaps lies the explanation of why some people will not—can not—read Shakespeare. A book to them is always something unreal, an escape from life; and they cannot bear books which, if they are understood at all, make actual life and actual people seem pale and unlikely. And along these lines we may persuade the more courageous people to abandon *aspidistra* 'Shakespeare' and read the plays as they might read a modern book, or even a newspaper. And, if they have a difficulty then in getting absorbed in the people and incidents of Shakespeare's universe, there is one chance left to them: Stop reading and go to the Old Vic. In a mysterious sentence in the introduction Mr. Harrison says that, after the publication of the *First Folio*, 'the plays became literature'. I'm afraid they nearly did. It is the glory of Miss Baylis that she has shown London that, in spite of this grisly accident, they did not cease to be plays.



## At Auction      o      o      o      o      o      o

I HAVE not often bid for anything at Christie's. I have wasted and enjoyed, enjoyed and paid for, a good many hours—more than I should like to count—at Sotheby's and Hodgson's, these two renowned marts where grave booksellers nod away hundreds of pounds in an afternoon. There is a great fascination in these auction rooms. One thing that especially fascinates me is the hour at which auctions begin. We have in our life a good many strange survivals of a more strenuous or more leisurely past, a past which, by merely being different, appears brighter and less prosaic than our present. There are the buttons at the back of our tail-coats. There are the strings on the hats of bishops. There were, until a while ago, the rosettes on the hats of drivers of private carriages. There are our lavatory basins—still mostly fixed at a height which reminds one that gentlemen used to sit at the basin, and have their washing done by a valet. This may, for all I know, still survive among those who keep valets. But few survivals force on us the difference between our ancestors' habits and our own as does the hour at which sales by auction begin. They almost invariably begin at one—at the hour, that is, when most Londoners are sitting down to luncheon. It must be long years since the frequenters of auction-rooms dined at five, or so, after a luncheon at eleven, or after no luncheon at all, but, in spite of its inconvenience to those who follow the ordinary rule

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of the meal-table, our auctioneers still mount the rostrum at one. I have noticed, occasionally, a polite wiping of the moustache by some occupants of that seat of honour ; but I am sure that this only betokens the previous consumption of a slight liquid refreshment.

I think it was the awkward hour of beginning which was responsible for the fact that I was once left at Christie's the owner of a picture I had no intention of buying, and did not desire to possess. The picture was owned by an American friend of mine, who had won it in one of the lotteries which are (or were) allowed by our law. She wanted to sell it, and I advised her to send it to Christie's. It was a fair, but not an extremely good, example of the work of an admirable modern water-colour painter. It was placed in a miscellaneous sale, and it was number one. Number one is not a good number, and my friend was horrified to hear the hour at which the sale began. Still she hoped for the best. The artist was very well known, and the picture had been valued by him at twenty guineas. A reserve of eleven pounds did not seem excessive ; and her friends said they would come in and encourage bidding by running up the price. Alas ! they reckoned without that fatal hour. At one o'clock I was the only person who was present to support her. The bidding was started at a fairly low price, and raised gradually by bids of half a guinea. When it reached seven I intervened, and we went up to ten. No one seemed very anxious to buy that water-colour. I waited a moment, I said 'and a half' (you never waste words at a sale). To my horror the hammer

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*Well* Those of my readers who are quick at arithmetic will have realized what had happened. It had never occurred to me that anyone would be ignorant of the fact that bidding at Christie's is done in guineas. I had not said, 'Put on a reserve of eleven guineas.' I had with that fatal economy of words, said 'eleven', and my friend had put on a reserve of eleven pounds. Ten and a half guineas, gentle reader—need I work out the sum? Rarely has sixpence caused more unexpected trouble. My friend had to pay the higher rate of commission, and was left with her picture; and I, who had done my bidding, I flattered myself, with a proper professionalism, looked rather an ass. And all this was the result of the hour at which auctions begin, and our English habit of clinging to another survival, the guinea, a coin which is not minted any longer and whose continued conventional existence enrages foreigners more than all our other eccentricities in the monetary system.

Yet without the guinea—though there seem to be occasional lapses from that—and without the sacred hour, our auctions would not be the traditional, splendid things they are. How splendid, what a record of adventure and daring, of great gains and not trifling losses, can be seen from Mr. H. C. Marillier's fascinating volume on one of the most famous of auctioneering firms, Christie's. The original Christie was the son of an Englishman and a Scotchwoman, and on his mother's side connected with the Clan MacDonald. The firm goes back to the year 1760; and in the beginning Mr. Christie sold other things than pictures.

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The contents of the five days' catalogue read amusingly to us, although many of the items were probably such as would make our present-day antique dealers lick their lips with envy at the prices fetched. 'Mother o' pearl Fish and Counters' figure repeatedly, as might be expected in that gaming age. Oriental china, frequently described as 'Blue Japan' and sometimes as 'Nankcen', also plays an important part. But what, we wonder, are 'a fine large india banda zeer', 'two hartychaoks', or 'a bird in a jessamy tree and a nest of young and four figures'? And who was 'Porter' who for £3 13s 6d bought Sir Isaac Newton Pope and Handel in bronzo finely repair'd by the late ingenious Mr Robihao? *Ingenious* appears in the catalogues of that time, to have been a word to conjure with. On the 9th of April 1767, 'at the Great Auction Room in Pallmall', Mr Christie disposed of the Household Furniture and other Valuable Effects of 'The Late ingenious Capt Orsbridge Author of the Twelve Capital Prints in the Expeditions and taking of the *Haïanna*, a sale which included several sets of the said prints.

Christie also sold horses, coffins, barrel organs, pigs and poultry, loads of meadow hay, and in the first lot sold was 'Six breakfast basons and plates'.

In spite, however, of these early adventures into regions now left to other firms, Christie's is inalienably associated in the public mind with the sale of objects of art, and especially of pictures. Other auctioneers of course, sell pictures, and there are eminent firms among them, but I suppose all over the world Christie's is better known than any other auctioneer of pictures except, perhaps, the Hotel Drouot. The reason for this reputation may be found written large in Mr Villiers's pages. He takes the reader through all the great sales which have occurred at Christie's, he has an excellent chapter on the history

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of the firm, and a concluding one on the change of values in pictures.

Apart from the people who know what they like, and buy it; from the much smaller number who know good things, and buy them when they can afford to, there has always been a small class of people who buy works of art as an investment. It is a dangerous as well as a fascinating occupation. Some men, like the late Hugh Lane, have apparently an unerring eye for monetary as well as for artistic value, others get into a position where they can make the value of the pictures, others are just born unlucky or indulge in a natural bad taste. Perhaps the most fatal errors, exemplified in Mr. Marillier's chapter on these changes, is to buy not pictures but a man's name. With old masters this may be safe. There are so few pictures of Botticelli, of Van Eyck, of many other painters, that any picture which can reasonably be ascribed to them is sure to be valuable. When we come to modern times it is different. To buy a picture, for instance, by Millais, simply because it was by Millais, was a fatal error: for he was a prolific and most unequal painter. A good many people have already found this out, and it is evident that the same thing will happen with Sargent's pictures, which fetched absurdly high prices at the recent sale. One instance will show how rapid the decline may be. Millais' 'Just Awake'

in 1873 fetched £1417. In 1909, when the general decline began to show itself, it dropped to £840, in 1918 to £787, and in 1923 to £451 10s.

This drop is really far worse than it appears, for it must not be forgotten, in a calculation of this kind,

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that £100 to day is barely the equivalent of £50 in 1873

Still, the chances of the market will never dash the courage of the real collector, whatever his motive for collecting, so long as the auction room exists. There is a kind of hypnosis in the very atmosphere of an auction. I have been to small country auctions and watched women, otherwise shrewd, give for old bedsteads, kitchen utensils, and other things more than they would have to pay for the same articles in the shops of the market town. People become intoxicated by the surroundings, the other bidders, the auctioneer, the curious sense that at any moment you may get a bargain—a chest of drawers with a secret drawer, an old Bible with hundreds of notes hidden somewhere in it. Hopes of this kind may seem very far from the polite, silent, rather bored expectations of the frequenters of the great auction rooms, but at bottom Christies as they sell old masters or suits of armour or priceless china, are really relying on the same instincts, the same modified, transmuted passion for the chase which made the farmers' wives of Dorset pay too highly for their bedsteads and their mattresses.

## The Novel      ◊      ◊      ◊      ◊      ◊      ◊

ONCE the kitchenmaid of literature, the novel has grown in importance, the novelist in self-importance, until, for a great many supposedly educated people, 'books' mean 'novels'. Those simple and egregious folk who ask, 'Are you fond of reading?' on inquiry are generally found to mean, 'Do you frequent the novel shelves of Coats, the Dash Chemists?' Those others, even simpler and more engaging, who asseverate their own passion for reading, 'I'm a great reader', or, 'I do like "good" books', invariably mean that in their less busy moments they occupy an hour or two, while they are half asleep, or sitting in a suburban train, in reading a novel. The franker of this class do not, in justice be it said, confuse their habitual vice with anything so remote as a taste for literature or an interest in art. Many of them would be ashamed to be found reading 'an old book'—a term whimsically used to denote a novel published six months before. It is admitted, that is, that reading is on a par with any other idiotic fashion, of which the stock defence, and for men of sense the sufficient condemnation, is the sacred formula, 'every one is wearing it'. There has, it is true, been a slight indication lately that the fashion is changing—in certain circles the essay is being worn. Not, of course, the long, flounced, heavy article, which was in great demand in Victorian days, but a lighter, slighter, briefer affair—sleeveless, rather low in cut, and allowing a perfectly cool

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display of ankle and leg. There is also a strong tendency in a limited circle, to bring back the play. These plays are worn even shorter than essays, and the cut is lower and higher yet. In spite of these vagaries, however, the chief literary style is still the novel, and it is still cut in such varied and contradictory manner that only an expert can recognize it as the same article. Some novels are ulsters, with which often are supplied week end dressing cases, suit cases, umbrellas, golf clubs, lawn tennis rackets, portable tantalus, luncheon and dinner baskets, thermos flasks (with drinks 'hot' and 'cold'), tobacco, matches, face powder, lipsticks and a store catalogue. Mr. James Joyce gives us other utensils which it is needless to specify. Then there is quite a different kind of novel, so flimsy that it can hardly be worn—it is scarcely more than a monocle (the Ronald Firbank rimless one is used in Haiti, Havana, and a few places in Italy), a white waistcoat, a set of studs, a bathing costume or neat arrangement of leaves and flowers (invented by Mr. de Vere Stacpoole, but, alas, never patented). It is not to be wondered at that this confusion dismays and annoys many critics. Some give the novel up altogether, refuse to allow it as a form, dismiss it as a hold all, a mere rag bag, a soiled linen basket, the contents of which are often exposed in public but never washed. But this downright, drastic contempt will not do. There are too many great names, past and present, associated with the novel. And after all the purely sceptical attitude which, when the European is confronted with the giraffe, makes him declare, 'I do not believe it,' is fundamentally irrational.



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There is a novel; if there were not, why all this rage against its recent surprising divergences? Even under its disguises, the modern novel generally gets recognized. The very tone in which heated gentlemen exclaim violently, 'I do not call it a novel,' implies that they know it is a novel, and wish, oh, so ardently, that it wasn't and couldn't be.

So there is nothing for it but patient investigation, efforts to capture the exact note of the novel, to decide what it is which gives the name to *Roderick Random*, *Tristram Shandy*, *The Cloister and the Hearth*, *The Poor Man*, *Zuleika Dobson*, *The Unpetitioned Heavens*, *Mrs Dallozay*, *The Demi-Gods*, and *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*. To the investigators comes a modern novelist, Mr. Hugh Walpole, with his *Rede Lecture*. Mr. Walpole is a good example of the traditional novelist, though he is not unaffected by certain modern opinions. He seems, to judge from one sentence in this essay, to share the vulgar error that psycho-analysis has invented the craft of casuistry. Some philosophers—not all—will be amused at this strange sentiment, 'the fading away of all the older psychology for the new intelligence of psycho-analysis, and the rest'. Psycho-analysis, at any rate in its present condition and under its present leaders, has about as much chance of affecting psychology as astrology has of making astronomy fade away. This, however, is by the way. Mr. Walpole, if I may return to the clothes simile, has always given us perfectly fitting, well-tailored, Savile Row garments. Once or twice he has ordered the material from abroad, but the Russian stuff was transmogrified in the Row, and

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differed very little from one of our best tweeds. He is not, however, arrogantly traditional, though for himself he likes the more fashionable clothes in Bond Street, he would never cut a friend or an acquaintance through distress at their unconventional garb. He has kindly things to say of Mrs. Woolf, of Mr. Lawrence, and, in an illuminating aside, reminds us that, odd as Mr. Joyce's trousers are, Lawrence Sterne's were a bit queer in shape. Traditionalist though he is, Mr. Walpole does not display extravagant horror at recent experiments and eccentricities: he believes in the novel of the past, and hopes, at any rate, that it has a future.

No, the tone of the English novel is still proudly maintained, even though, with the crowd of novelists, it is often difficult for contemporaries to see their way. Men and women will arrive, and, indeed, are probably with us now, who will recover that largeness of vision, sincerity of spirit and creative power that the older men and women knew. But ours is a difficult time, not only is the art of the novel a hundred and fifty years older than in the days of Fielding, but also our modern life is infinitely faster, more crowded, more tumultuous, more restless than was his. Art must have its quiet hours, its moments of authenticity, its long reflections, its long tranquillity after the fret of excited experience.

There is, I think, a good deal of nonsense in the passage. I do not believe for a moment that 'Life' is more crowded, or faster, or more tumultuous than it was in Fielding's time. There are more superficial distractions for a larger number of people, but these distractions do not quicken, fill or cause a tumult in anyone's life. They merely kill thought, and deaden, not accelerate, the emotional, intellectual and spiritual forces. Again, many modern comforts

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make life less exciting, emptier and less adventurous. A journey, an arrival at an inn—to take two instances only—are far less thrilling than they were in the riotous days of Tom Jones. What Mr. Walpole means by 'moments of authenticity' can be guessed at; *his implication that it is harder for an artist of to-day to find quiet is quite false.* It depends, as it always did, on temperament and character. Thomas Hardy, J. M. Barrie, Samuel Butler, George Moore, among the older generation, Stella Benson, Rose Macaulay, Sheila Kaye-Smith, D. H. Lawrence, James Stephens, of a younger, have had apparently no difficulty in 'keeping themselves to themselves' when they felt they must. The inability to do this is evidence, not of a greater restlessness in the age, but of a weaker power in the novelist.

If the novel dies, then, it will not be, I think, the fault of our lapse into a more barbarian standard of culture, nor will it be due to some novelist's infatuation for the antic gestures of psycho-analysis. This latter reason for the novelists' difficulty is, however, more serious—as Mr Walpole points out, the absence of 'some kind of belief in the value of something' is fatal to the Arts. Still, Art would overcome a pinchbeck psychology which denies personality, just as it overcomes the grander philosophy of the Greek Fate and the Calvinist theology, just as Thomas Hardy overcame his recent philosophy by the power of a greater truth implicit in his very being. If the novel dies, eddying away into a shapeless backwater of observation and comment, or refined down to a dewpond of exquisite reflection, it will die because intelligent people tire of reading novels. After all,

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that fate overcame an older and more magnificent form. Where is the epic? Who would be bold enough to predict its resurrection? And if the form used by Homer and Virgil and Dante can die, the form used by Fielding and Balzac and Thackeray may die too. The world may be moving towards the broadcast anecdote, something at once snappy and simple. The essay and the play may dethrone the novel, and in a hundred years' time it may seem as strange a taste to read novels as it would to-day to read the sermons of eighteenth century divines or Miss Joanna Bailie's 'Plays on the Passions'.

I cherish a different hope myself. I cannot help believing that suddenly the popular taste will abandon those gilded piles of rubbish which make dreadful the railway bookstalls, and then, while the few artists who write novels will no doubt continue to do so, yet the output will be so reduced that those readers who are accustomed to 'dope' will return to the greatest novelists of the past and, in the absorption of wholesome food, will gradually lose their appetite for wind and straw, recover their mental health, and once more make fashionable that study of human nature which is the only true purpose of the novel.

## George Meredith    ♪    ♪    ♪    ♪    ♪

IT is the doom of all great men to be made into great figures ; but it is rare for a great man to make a great figure of himself. Great men who are also public men, Cæsar, Napoleon, Gregory VII, St Thomas of Canterbury, no doubt theatricalize themselves—but unwillingly, one imagines, and in a kind of weary obedience to the public's passion for hero-worship. Yet the very greatest men, even in spectacular positions, contrive to avoid the appearance of the great figure. There is no touch of it in Abraham Lincoln. Artists have no excuse, and rarely any desire, to be great figures. The normal man of letters, or painter, or musician is only too anxious to be treated as a human being ; and the greater the artist, the simpler, as a rule, is the man. I am sure Mr. Priestley is right when he ascribes our modern distaste for George Meredith to something incurably theatrical in him, something that would not allow him to be simple, something which made him pose, hold himself in an attitude. It was once a fashion to compare Meredith with Browning—a foolish fashion. Browning was a singularly unassuming, ordinary man, his obscurity of style, when he is obscure, belongs entirely to the poet. It is no pose of the person. Meredith's obscurity is like a cloak or a necktie—worn to impress. His abominable phraseology comes not from any obscurity of mind, but from a disdain of simple speech, a real desire to

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make his work difficult. He was oracular, Delphic, in conversation, and even in his letters.

In his extremely interesting analysis of Meredith's character Mr Priestley suggests that Meredith, a morbidly sensitive person, shy, if not ashamed, of his family business (tailoring) smelted himself an armour of arrogance. In his life, in his pose, and, I think, in his style, he wears this armour—but the naked man comes out in the matter of the books. For you have this extraordinary contrast. Meredith undoubtedly made a secret of his parentage, and of his family history, and yet in *Evan Harrington* he had given the whole secret away, even to the length of calling his grandfather Melchizedek Meredith, by the soubriquet of 'The Great Mel'. I have little doubt that Mr Priestley is right again in putting down this absurd susceptibility of Meredith's very largely to the impressions of schoolboy years, but I do not think these altogether account for his deliberate mystifications. Is it not possible that both Peacock and his daughter—Meredith's first wife—had something to do with the extreme shame Meredith acquired about the tailoring business? There is something unnatural in Meredith's refusal to see his dying wife, something which seems to me far more like the unendurable pain of a sensitive nature than the unforgiving anger of a cruel nature. If Mrs Meredith had ever taunted him with being the tailor's son, if Peacock's curious temper had made Meredith feel he must be quiet about that business, would not this account for Meredith's inability to see his wife again? He was a man, I think, who could forgive his wife's desertion and infidelity, but I am

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not sure he would be able to forgive a sneer at scissors. It is, indeed, plain from *Modern Love* that he could not only forgive but could understand his wife's more serious misconduct, but he might never have felt able to forgive her if she had mocked him. This is, of course, all speculation, and until we have some authoritative book on Meredith's early life the whole subject is insoluble. Mr. Priestley writes well on Meredith's character and its contradictions.

One of the friends of his later years, Lady Butler, has told us how his pride made him dislike receiving even the smallest presents, and, facing the not uncommon charge of ingratitude against Meredith, has pointed out to us that 'no one should expect an eagle to be grateful'. With eagles we have nothing to do, but the pride that forbids the expression of ordinary gratitude is not the mark of a great mind but a little one. There is about great men a certain almost careless magnanimity, a large and easy tolerance, the attitude of a good humoured giant among creatures of a lesser stature, that enables them to wave away the smaller injuries and grievances and to deal gently with old opponents. They have large reserves of strength and do not need to tighten themselves up for every casual encounter. They act in such a way that they can be appreciated as men, and there is no necessity to excuse them as eagles. This plain human dignity in the more important concerns of life and this lounging good humour in the more trifling affairs are both absent from Meredith. To make a not uncommon distinction, he was a great writer but he was not a great man.

It seems to me too rounded. Meredith was evidently not a great man, if our standard is Francis of Assisi, or Walter Scott, or even Mark Twain; but he was not a small man. He was, rather, I think, a man whose greatness was cruelly thwarted and prevented by a very violent blow to his affections.

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He lived by his affections; his philosophy is a philosophy of the affections, and he was terribly hurt at some time in his life. A greater man would have got over it more easily; a man with a different religion and a different philosophy would never have felt it so bitterly. Meredith was, I believe, a man who once exposed himself fully and frankly to some one he loved passionately and completely, and was laughed at. From that moment he determined never to give such a chance again.

The critical part of Mr Priestley's book, while it contains much suggestive and some brilliant work, is not so satisfactory. He is excellent in his account of Meredith's philosophy, and makes good his point that Meredith, of all the Victorians, was the real pagan—the man with a genuine religion of nature. He overrates, I think, the value of that philosophy and that religion. There is something facile about Meredith's evasion of the snares which, we may admit, rather hamper the other great Victorians. Mr. Priestley is at his worst in his brief comparison of Meredith with other authors, I hope he is already sorry to have written that Browning takes refuge 'in the purely dramatic and grotesque and, when these fail him, falls back on mere romantic heartiness'. I do not know what he means by 'taking refuge', would he say Shakespeare took refuge in 'the merely dramatic' of *Hamlet*, or *Measure for Measure*, or *Troilus and Cressida*; and in what category would he place *Gold Hair at Pornic*, *Childe Roland*, *Rabbi ben Ezra*, or *Caliban upon Setebos*? There is a sense in which one could say Meredith took refuge in a simple, unthinking worship of



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natural forces ; but Browning had no need of stalking horses.

Nor, in his discussion on Meredith the novelist, do I understand what Mr Priestley means by this claim :

*But the indirect influence of Meredith has been enormous.* As we have seen, he enlarged the scope of fiction, gave it new matter and a new manner, and when the history of the Modern English Novel comes to be written, he should be given a prominent place in it, not only as an original genius but also as a highly important innovator, a man who added a whole new octave to the instrument of prose fiction.

Mr. Priestley has already explained in an excellent passage of close ratiocination where the novel of Meredith fails. In his effort to graft comedy on to the novel, ' the narrative really exists for the sake of the scene ' , and of *The Egoist*, indubitably Meredith's greatest prose book, it is deliberately recognized as a comedy, ' the novel form being the merest framework ' Here, I think, Mr. Priestley is on sound ground, but I cannot follow him when he argues that Meredith's narrative is bad because of his interest in the scenes. Thackeray's scenes, Scott's scenes, Balzac's scenes, Dickens' scenes are not bad, because these novelists were masters of narrative. Meredith's poverty of narrative springs rather from an impatience, a refusal to consider the effect of circumstance on character. It would be truer to say that Meredith was the father of the cinematograph than that he added ' a new octave to the instrument of prose fiction ' In making this astonishing claim Mr Priestley has perhaps been aided by his deliberate isolation of the English novel. That seems to me a fatal mistake in the consideration of any English

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novelist The novels of England and the Continent cannot be considered separately ; there has always, since the days of Richardson and Sterne, been interaction between English fiction and the fiction of Europe It is remarkable that the name of Balzac does not once occur in this essay.

Mr Priestley's criticism of Meredith's poetry could not be bettered Here his preoccupation with purely English literature is an advantage , English poetry is, at its best, almost entirely independent The greatest of Meredith's poems is, by general consent, *Modern Love* It is one of the greatest sonnet-sequences (for why refuse the name sonnet to these poems ?) in our language , and in it Meredith's passion, wit, vigour, and earthly wisdom reach a wonderful expression Some of the novels, no doubt, still hold their own—*feasts* may be found in them, but in *Modern Love* the author achieved a perfection which he never was to reach in prose.

## Leo Tolstoy    ♡    ♡    ♡    ♡    ♡    ♡

**W**E are still deceived by size, impressed by scale. Just as in public life men of vitality and volubility impress us more easily than men of subtlety and reticence, so our judgment, even of spiritual and intellectual things, is liable to be distracted by mere magnitude. It is the common error of democracy, for many of us, forgetting that democracy is a means not an end, can forgive its inconveniences only if we regard it as an idol, and we are all apt to believe that anything which costs a great many people a great deal of trouble has for that reason some absolute value. What we profess in our religious faith is directly opposed to this, the story of Elijah and 'the still, small voice' insists on the same lesson as the parable of the widow's mite—what seems infinitesimal, what we may indeed, in our arrogance, class among 'the things which are not', may be far greater, more real and ultimately more triumphant than the rushing thunder of all the things which so magnificently are. Intensity is what makes reality, and anything which lacks that intensity becomes not more, but less real when it is magnified or multiplied. Constantly I have to remind myself of this truth when I read Tolstoy's philosophic or moral writings. He was so great an artist, so vehemently vivid a person, built on so gigantic a scale for sin or for sanctity, that one is in continuous danger of forgetting that his moral problem was not an exceptional one, that his desperate efforts at a false solution were not, for a

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Russian at least, exceptional, and that his failure was in spite of its scale and its influence, the same failure which all of us lament when we fall short of the ideal we have set ourselves

The chief value of Mr Fausset's essay on Tolstoy is that while as any sensitive and imaginative man must be, he is fully conscious of Tolstoy's tremendous power, he never allows his judgment to be deflected by the magnitude of the conflict, as it is exhibited in Tolstoy. All his life long Tolstoy was torn asunder between the demands of his flesh and the claims of his moral sense, between his passionate susceptibility to all natural beauty and his conviction that in that susceptibility there was something wrong. From his youth he was a sick soul and nowhere is his sickness more thoroughly diagnosed than by himself in the private diary, of which a portion (covering the years 1853-57) has at last been published. We know from Tolstoy's own writings that he regarded women as mentally and morally inferior to men. As late as 1892 he could write

I wish most earnestly that I had the power to transmit to my wife a portion of that religious conscience which gives me the possibility of sometimes raising myself above the sorrows of life although this conscience is hardly accessible to women

Mr Fausset does well in showing that, in statements of this kind, Tolstoy the old man had *not* changed the opinions of Tolstoy the boy. This disastrous error produced a fatal conflict in Tolstoy's soul, because he was the victim of a passionate sensuality, to which, as the diary testifies, he continually yielded. And for this temptation and for his own fall he blamed

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woman; himself obsessed by the physical, he could not, or would not, believe that nearly all women were not deliberately provocative, deeply sensuous, benightedly carnal. And how ignominious he thought this power over him of a being so frightfully inferior! In marriage he sought a solution, and found none, for he had no idea of true marriage, which can only occur between equals. Tolstoy neither could nor tried to believe this. He saw woman not as a person, but as a power, maleficent, magical, and terrifying.

As soon as a man approaches a woman he succumbs to her stupefying influence and becomes intoxicated and crazy. I used formerly to feel uncomfortable and uneasy when I saw a lady dressed up for a ball, but now I am simply frightened, and I plainly see her as something dangerous and illicit.

His general attitude to women, while it has much affinity with the most exaggerated theories of monastic denunciators, has also something of the savage vulgarity of the philosophy of the man of the world. For the extreme ascetic and the worldly agree here—that each will seek anywhere but in his own past and his own imagination for the origin of his sins, and, instead of patiently, and in prayer, hunting for the cause of evil, will prefer to attack violently those whom he regards as the occasion and the opportunity.

In Tolstoy this cruel condemnation of his fellows was part of a larger mental and moral perplexity. Mr Fausset points out the extraordinary, almost painful vividness of Tolstoy's sensuous impressions. When we read Tolstoy it seems absurd to claim that the visible world existed for any other author. He

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has the primitive, unblemished sensibility of Homer—and yet it cannot remain unblemished, for he was aware, with an exquisite agony, of another world of sophistication and intelligence. As in the history of Russia we may say that the Renaissance, the rationalistic and the scientific periods came almost simultaneously, so in this one man of stupendous genius, the age of faith, the age of reason and the age of sceptical inquiry met, and in their meeting almost destroyed their unfortunate host. I do not think it is stressing one aspect of the moral problem too hardly if we say that Tolstoy's inability ever to reach an intellectual synthesis may have sprung from his utter failure to achieve a moral synthesis. He never makes up his mind that for him the way of asceticism is the right way, he is not a man who, having chosen a path, sometimes falls in it or wanders from it, he is a man who finds it impossible in the true sense to choose at all.

Here I think we have the secret of his religious literalism and of his readiness to be so positive in assertion that, long before his death, he had founded a kind of invisible church. Finding confusion and dubiety in his own heart, he set up outside himself things solid and four square to which he could direct his devotion. He tries everything in turn. In the diary he tried confession. He tried to live simply and sensuously as the peasants in the Caucasus, never seeing that he, through his own subtlety, gave them that simplicity, as he gave it later to the moujik. He tried to practise the orthodox religion more carefully. After his marriage had failed to give him peace, he tried to find rest by ridding himself of his

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property. He reinterpreted Christianity so that it should become a religion not for Everyman but for Leo Nikolaivitch Tolstoy. He made disciples and mocked at them. And he never found peace. For he believed that peace was the gift of some external authority, and he never discovered an external authority which commanded the allegiance of his whole personality. When he was twenty-nine he wrote .

*I don't deserve anything but am prepared to drag along the joyless tow-ropes of existence. But I don't know what it is for. What is astonishing is not that God decrees that a piece of bread should be His Son's flesh, it is a hundred thousand times stranger that we live on—not knowing what for, that we love the good—yet on nothing is it written. 'This is good, that is evil.'*

Although that entry in his diary may represent only a mood, it does also symbolize the weakness of Tolstoy. He wanted things labelled. He saw the world of appearance, not as an illusion, or a veil, or a sacrament but something vividly alive and potent, and he resented its clutch on his soul, its influence on his mind. 'On nothing is it written. "This is good, that is evil"'. The poet whom he despised might have taught him something here. 'There's nothing good or bad, but thinking makes it so'; or better, he could have found in Catholic theology that sin consists, not in acts, but in the deliberate perversion of the will.

## Weariness and Anatole France      ♪      ♪

**B**EFORE his death the reputation of Anatole France in his own country had sunk very considerably, in this country since the enterprising and excellent series of translations inaugurated by Frederic Chapman became popular his reputation was most unduly exalted, and since his death we have seen the issue of various little books of recollections, conversations, anecdotes and gossip all of which, whether they stress the philosophical, the literary or the merely scandalous aspects of the author, treat him as if he were one of the great figures of literary Europe. Can this claim be upheld? Is there anything in France's fiction or in the many volumes of his conversations which would enable him to rank with the great writers or great thinkers of our modern world?

Mr Lewis May claims that Anatole France was a great talker, and if the title be used to indicate a man who talked inordinately and on all occasions, it must certainly be granted. Also France was a lively talker, sometimes a brilliant one, and on some subjects, not always the most edifying, a well informed one. If, however, we mean by a great talker a man whose conversation is the utterance of great or profound thought, of deep conviction, a mirror of wisdom (however distorted the reflection), I do not see how France can for a moment be put beside the great talkers of history. Not only is he vastly inferior to such a talker as Dr Johnson, he



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will not compare with men to whom he was more akin in temperament, talent and opinion. Contrasted with Horace Walpole or Voltaire, France is timid, derivative and fundamentally frivolous. The last charge may be brought against Walpole; but his frivolity does not usually damage his subject. It is true that, if his passion for justice was roused, as it was in the Dreyfus Affair, France lost his slippancy of manner, but even when his feelings were roused, his essential scepticism of mind affected unfavourably his handling of the subject. This is seen very plainly in his book on Joan of Arc, a monument of labour mispent in defence of an impossible thesis. It is instructive to compare his great book with Andrew Lang's devastating criticism of it. Lang, too, was often slipshod in manner; but he had fundamental beliefs which enabled him to preserve a sense of proportion such as Anatole France never acquired.

An odd air of the sceptical cleric hung perpetually over France. He never had a really free mind, or any capacity, or, I suspect, desire, for free thought, and this impotence of his vitiates all his critical work. His excessive distaste for metaphysics was not the disgust of a scientist, but the caprice of a dilettante. He was afraid of discovering, if he probed too far, truths which would disturb his sceptical prejudices, he always clung to his incredulity with the petulant dogmatism of a not very intelligent seminarist, and his taunts at the faith he denied were too often a mere exhibition of profanity. His weakness as a thinker, his extraordinary unsuitability as a leader or prophet was seen in the war. Even M. Segur

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admits that he was then 'constrained in manner, cautious, almost timid in his utterances'. He compares here very badly not only with Mr. Bernard Shaw, but with his fellow countryman, Henri Barbusse. The point is not whether Mr. Shaw and M. Barbusse were right in their opinions, but that they expressed what they believed with vigour and courage, while France was afraid of expressing his opinions frankly on the subject of war and of propaganda. If he criticized at all, he criticized with a kind of subdued irony; or, as M. Segur says, 'fearing that his words would be misinterpreted, he expressed himself only in colourless and conventional language'. It is not for us to judge any man for a weakness of this kind, but we are entitled to say that a man who exhibits such a weakness at such a time has no claims to be hailed as a leader of thought.

In nearly all his conversations, whether he is talking on Socialism, Einstein, Metaphysics, the Cinema, Spiritualism, Laughter, Love, Progress and New Schools of Thought, two things are plain—Anatole France's deep-rooted pessimism and his incurable frivolity. What he sought from life was illusion, and no one angered him so much as a thinker who believed in the existence of absolute truth and that man could approximately express it. In the conversation on love, by which Anatole France meant physical desire, he puts the bitterness of his creed plainly enough.

Yes, Madam, Love is dead! Love is the child of ignorance, since it proceeds from illusion. It is chiefly found in simple, naïve periods such as the age of Chivalry. But if you would escape it, you must grasp it firmly, analyse it and so do it

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to death. . . It was the nineteenth century that played a large part in killing love. Science put it to flight. our learned men stripped it bare and displayed it to us in all its naked wretchedness, its nullity. We know too much, nowadays, to be lovers any more. We have become positivists. We have lost our faith. . . Love knows that whose essays to grasp him, will lose him. Every illusion vanishes at a touch. We, too, have laid over heavy hands on every mystery and thus we have prepared for ourselves an endless disillusion. We have discovered that all is vanity, all illusion, and ever since then, we have found life a mortal weariness to the flesh.

France belonged by temperament and intellectual prejudice—one cannot speak of conviction about a man whose whole mental life was merely opinion—to a very old-fashioned school. He preferred externals, he hated any suggestion that things might not, after all, be susceptible to critical analysis, that the will and the imagination might be instruments of discovering truth quite as valid as the critical intelligence. Pursuing pleasure, as he did, for its own sake, he naturally found it in the end a cause of intolerable boredom, and he never considered that his boredom might come, not from the nature of pleasure, but from his own method of approach to it. Yet he might have still, in spite of these temperamental weaknesses, discovered a method of truth if it had not been for a weakness more fatal still, one in which he is typical of certain tendencies in this age, at least in England, and by which he became a leader, not of thought, but of fashion. He expressed all his life a contempt for what he called the anti-intellectualist philosophies, those systems associated primarily with the names of Bergson and James;

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yet he himself really was a far greater anti-intellectualist than either of those thinkers. It is true that there are grave dangers in the Pragmatist position, just as there are grave dangers in the position taken up by Tyrell and other Catholic modernists. But these men did do something valuable. They insisted on the truth, known to the plain man and the mystic alike, that the intellectual approach to truth is not the only approach, that we can reach ultimate values and find convictions by other roads which are less susceptible to the examination of the critical intelligence. They do not deny the validity of that intelligence, while they do insist that the statement of a truth can never be anything but symbolic, and that the best symbols are not only or always or necessarily words.

What is now Anatole France's position? He finally insists not merely that our statement of truth is approximate, but that there is no absolute truth, and (though this is rather implicit than explicit in his works) that there is finally no such thing as a real human personality, capable of responding to the appeal of truth. For the unreality which he ascribes to reality is in truth only the reflection of the nothingness to which his will reduced his intellectual conceptions. He is inveighing against his own mind and his own philosophy when he says :

All we love is illusion. Analyse our ideal, and lo, it turns to ashes ! . . . Happiness, like the Ideal, like love, crumbles into dust beneath our fingers do we but touch it never so lightly. Reality is nought, Imagination is all, and woe to him who would seek to find truth beyond the confines of his dreams.

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It is by this philosophy, presented with great wit and considerable learning, set forth in volumes often of easy fascination, arranged with a bland confidence that all men and women are the victims of their sensuality, and that the only result of thinking is to escape from the consequences of thought, that Anatole France has charmed so many people. It is a philosophy curiously in accord with the world of younger people after the war, the failure of things hoped for, the disappointment in things believed, the treachery of things loved made it easy for too many of us to discredit hope and faith and love. It is always a temptation to visit the consequences of our own weaknesses on the nature of things, and to find an excuse for our faults in the making of philosophies that exalt them into necessities. The temptation is fatal and if yielded to leads only to desolation and dishonour, the system which it leads man to embrace is one with which Christianity can have nothing at all to do

AT first it seems a familiar world, the world of Clovis and his aunt, of Bassington and his mother, of Reginald and his friends. The elegance, the dress, the epigrams, the idleness, the heartlessness, the wit, the fun slipping crash into farce—we think we know them all and the world they belong to. We trace its history. A patch here reminds us of its beginnings, the modish, exquisite comedy of Congreve, the savage satire of Wycherley. There is that in these stories. Then we are reminded of the world of Disraeli and Lytton, differently trousered, less outrageously waistcoated, not so befurred, beringed, befobbed and bebraceleted, but recognizably the same world—a world with the same idols, the same cults, the same amusements and obligations. And that scented, laced society of Lytton's and Disraeli's yields, in passages or in whole stories, to its successor, the world of James MacNeill Whistler and Oscar Fingall O'Flahertie Wills Wilde, the world in which extravagance was wedded to excess, and impudence took hands with insolence, and brilliance too often looked flashy. That was a world, to use the modern slang, whose boasted superiority was only the symbol of an inferiority complex. After the society of Wilde and Whistler we come to the more recent manner, echoes of Dodo, faint, far records of the Dolly Dictaphone sound in our ears. Folly, a lovely, laughing, bubbling folly had come, it is true, before Dolly and her dialogues; there was the

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meringue froth of Oscar Wilde's dialogue. When Saki reminds us of Wilde it is of his plays we think, or of the epigrams in the tradition of his plays—epigrams as near poetry and the lighter imagination as any nonsense can be. The best are part of that fine English tradition—for though Wilde was Irish and H. H. Munro Scotch, the tradition is really Lear's and Lewis Carroll's. They are apothegms of wise nonsense, the best of them. ‘She was a good cook as cooks go, and as cooks go, she went.’ And, describing the raiment of a slum-worker in South London, ‘Clothes made more in Southwark than in anger.’ Even the more sophisticated jests are akin to this nonsense. ‘I regard one's hair as I regard husbands, as long as one is seen together in public one's private divergencies don't matter.’ ‘Once a female, always a female. Nature is not infallible, but she always abides by her mistakes.’

Even in his nonsense, however, Saki forces one to forget his ancestry. A longer passage from ‘A Touch of Realism’ will show his more distinctive quality. The scene is a Christmas house-party: ‘Every one in the house-party had to be a character and behave consistently all the time’; the characters in this passage are Bertie Van Tahn—a cousin doubtless of the incomparable Clovis—and Waldo Plubley, a youth whose name is almost sufficient evidence of his character. It may be mentioned, however, that ‘nine hours’ unbroken sleep, preceded by elaborate breathing exercises and other hygienic ritual, was among the indispensable regulations which Waldo imposed on himself’.

On this particular night the irreducible nine hours

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were severely mutilated by the sudden and by no means noiseless incursion of a pyjama-clad figure into Waldo's room at an hour midway between midnight and dawn

‘ What is the matter ? What are you looking for ? ’ asked the awakened and astonished Waldo, slowly recognizing Van Tahn, who appeared to be searching hastily for something he had lost

‘ Looking for sheep,’ was the reply

‘ Sheep ? ’ exclaimed Waldo

‘ Yes, sheep You don't suppose I'm looking for giraffes, do you ? ’

‘ I don't see why you should expect to find either in my room,’ retorted Waldo furiously

‘ I can't argue the matter at this hour of the night,’ said Bertie, and began hastily rummaging in the chest of drawers Shirts and underwear went flying on to the floor

‘ There are no sheep here, I tell you,’ screamed Waldo

‘ I've only your word for it,’ said Bertie, whisking most of the bedclothes on to the floor, ‘ if you weren't concealing something you wouldn't be so agitated.’

Waldo was by this time convinced that Van Tahn was raving mad, and made an anxious effort to humour him

‘ Go back to bed like a dear fellow,’ he pleaded, ‘ and your sheep will turn up all right in the morning ’

‘ I dare say,’ replied Bertie gloomily, ‘ without their tails Nice fool I shall look with a lot of Maux sheep ’

And by way of emphasizing his annoyance at the prospect he sent Waldo's pillows flying to the top of the wardrobe

‘ But why no tails ? ’ asked Waldo, whose teeth were chattering with fear and rage and lowered temperature

‘ My dear boy, have you never heard the ballad of Little Bo Peep ? ’ said Bertie with a chuckle ‘ It's my character in the Game, you know If I didn't go hunting about for my lost sheep, no one would be able to guess who I was. and now go to sleep; weeps like a good child or I shall be cross with you ’

I leave you to imagine,’ wrote Waldo in the course of a



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long letter to his mother, ‘how much sleep I was able to recover that night, and you know how essential nine uninterrupted hours of slumber are to my health.’

On the other hand he was able to devote some wakeful hours to exercises in breathing wrath and fury against Bertie van Tahn.

So far it is possible to think of Saki as an author original in his material, fancifully delicate in fun, but not an original. A very little reading of him will, however, force the reader to revise that opinion. Another author comes to mind when one thinks of Saki's more peculiar traits, an author whom it is better to use for contrast than for comparison. Rudyard Kipling has his affinities at least with Wilde and Anthony Hope. The critical neglect which has overcome that great author is shown very plainly in the fact that few people now remember how often Kipling originated a manner. *The Story of the Godsby* is as certainly the origin of Dolly as *Bedelia Herodsfoot* is the source of many tales of many mean streets. Another strain in Kipling is entirely his own, the strain of the uneasy, the uncomfortable, the uncanny. And here too lies Saki's originality, for his excursions into that unclean, unwholesome, red-lighted world of terror and cruelty are as dainty, and more dangerous than Kipling's. There is no story of Kipling's, not even *The End of the Passage*, which makes one doubt the author's sanity, common sense and capacity to decide on the right side. There is scarcely a grim story of Saki's which does not fill one with apprehensions for the author's balance. In Kipling I know that his movement in a universe of doubtful and difficult creatures and circumstances is

deliberately made, he knows that he is adventuring, and goes home to write of his adventures. When Saki deals in the abnormal I feel immediately he is at home. His pleasant pictures, the gay, the satirical, the flippant are all, excellent as many of them are, so much make believe. When he enters the region of the forbidden and the frightening, he is terribly in earnest and horribly at home. To read *Sredni Vashtar*, or *The Cobweb*, or *The Music on the Hill*, or *Gabriel Ernest* is to forget all Saki's modish progenitors, and to find in him an author who gives a completely new thrill—a thrill which no other author, so far as I know, has ever given, though I find in his manner something which reminds me of the more sinister drawings of Aubrey Beardsley, something even not unlike the spiritual terror, the nameless apprehension which can be found in some lithographs of Odilon Redon.

Of course one remembers Poe. I would never deny to Poe an exquisite capacity for troubling sensitive nerves. It is a greater capacity than was Saki's, but it is not, I think, so monstrous, so inhumanly desolating. Poe in all his work writes like a man whose nerves are exacerbated, whose spirit is disastrously haunted, but whose brain is clear. Saki, when he goes into that strange world of clear cruelty and un pitying horror and desperate hatred, is not overwhelmed, he goes into it singing, and makes me believe it his home. No doubt the effect thus gained is largely a literary device. Just as Beardsley's more corrupt imagings are terrible because of the elegance of the figures portrayed, so Saki's stories

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are more horrible because of the airy fashion of the characters and the telling. That is, as I say, deliberate. But there is something beyond that.

It is difficult here not to think of his life, as his sister tells it in the preface to *The Square Egg*. A boy of extreme susceptibility and little sensitiveness, he was unjustly and unfairly treated in his boyhood. That has happened to many children, and many have resented it bitterly after the years of childhood have become a memory. Some, through the exercise of common sense or the Christian religion, or their own experiences with children, have learnt, even though they never say it, that there is something to be said for the grown persons who discipline and destroy our fancies and imaginings. Saki never learnt that. He remained rebelliously a child, and he took awful revenges on his elders. There is a delectation exquisitely lingered over in the end of *Sredni Vashtar*.

A sour faced maid came in to lay the table for tea, and still Conradin stood and wasted and watched. Hope had crept by inches into his heart, and now a look of triumph began to blaze in his eyes that had only known the wistful patience of defeat. Under his breath, with a furtive exultation, he began once again the psalm of victory and devastation. And presently his eyes were rewarded. Out through that doorway came a long, low, yellow and brown beast, with eyes a blink at the waning daylight, and dark, wet stains around the fur of jaws and throat. Conradin dropped on his knees. The great pole cat ferret made its way down to a small brook at the foot of the garden, drank for a moment, then crossed a little plank bridge and was lost to sight in the bushes. Such was the passing of *Sredni Vashtar*.

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‘ Tea is ready,’ said the sour faced maid, ‘ where is the mistress ? ’

‘ She went down to the shed some time ago,’ said Conradin

And while the maid went to summon her mistress to tea, Conradin fished a toasting fork out of the sideboard drawer and proceeded to toast himself a piece of bread. And during the toasting of it and the buttering of it with much butter and the slow enjoyment of eating it, Conradin listened to the noises and silences which fell in quick spasms beyond the dining room door. The loud foolish screaming of the maid, the answering chorus of wondering ejaculations from the kitchen region, the scuttering footsteps and hurried embassies for outside help, and then, after a lull, the scared sobbings and the shuffling tread of those who bore a heavy burden into the house.

‘ Whoever will break it to the poor child ? I couldn’t for the life of me ! ’ exclaimed a shrill voice. And while they debated the matter among themselves, Conradin made himself another piece of toast.

In such a passage as this Saki attains an emotional and spiritual freedom which is alien to his mind and his temperament when he is writing of kindly actions, of pity, or sympathy, or trust or honour, or love. It seems to me extraordinary that his violent spiritual scepticism, his enormous accidia, his profound distrust of goodness should not have been given proper place in the critical notices written of him. Admirable introductions by well known authors were contributed to the collected pocket edition of his works, but most of the authors had the air of carrying flowers to a funeral, and refrained from discussing the serious flaws in the character of the deceased. The essays which most nearly approach the actual central problem of Saki’s genius are those by Mr Walpole, Mr Milne and Mr. Nevinson, but

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the approach in each instance is made an occasion of avoidance. Mr Walpole is temperamentally incapable of appreciating the essential thing in Saki's work. He tries to minimize Saki's enjoyment of cruelty, he sees in it a revelation of ‘ the dangers and perils of life ’, he finds in that dreadful story—a story which might have been written by John Galsworthy turned madman among the tombs—*The Relicence of Lady Anne*, ‘ a sinister warning ’. Mr. Milne has nothing to say about the horrors in Saki. His note, charming and polite as it is, gives me the impression that he discovered, when he sat down to write his introduction, that he did not really like the author at all, only a few things of his, and those not the characteristic things. Mr. Nevins on should know the darker ‘ Saki ’; but he is so occupied with being more than fair to the man whose political views he must detest, that he gives us, in his introduction, a Saki no reader of the books will recognize. For when once the reader has seen in Saki's writings that intolerable and atrocious vein of cruelty, of revenge, he will find it in many stories which have hitherto seemed innocent. After all, a critic must be able to discover why it is that an author so obviously derivative should so impress him with a sense of originality, a fanciful sense of loneliness. There is, I think, no explanation except that H. H. Munro is, since William Beckford, the most perverse, the least human of authors. He is only alive completely when he is cruel and conscious; but unconsciously many of his stories are stories with the same lust as that which invigorates *Sredni Vashar*. His soul was not quite sane, and its insanity is the

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more horrible because of his obvious sanity of mind and his known sanity of body. He hides his radical distinction from his more normal fellows in many episodes of jest and humour, but his obsession becomes evident even in the lightest touches. No items are so funny as those which hurt, no hurts are so amusing as the mortal ones. When he is inventing a puerile farce, Saki is careful to introduce cruelty. So in *The Schwartz-Metterkulme Method* the best jokes are cruel jokes. When Mrs Quabarl says condescendingly to the false governess

We got very satisfactory references about you from Canon Teep, a very estimable man, I should think

the false governess replies, ‘ Drinks like a fish and beats his wife, otherwise a very lovable character ’ All the jokes, if one looks closely at them, are as devoid of innocent pleasantry as they are of kind humour, they refer to a world where deformity and accidents are reasonable objects for laughter. It is for this reason that so many people find it hard to go on with Saki. He delights and diverts, then slowly one realizes that one is being asked to delight in something hideously crooked and inhuman. Time and again as I read the books I am reminded of the great ‘ Masque of the Red Death ’. The lights are dim, the music gay, the dancers are skilful and graceful, the ball goes on. Suddenly there is a pause in the music, some unheard, unseen signal is received, and the dancers uncloak. Behind every domino is decay and corruption. You gaze aghast, terrified at this vision of foulness and dissolution.

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As suddenly the music begins again, the faces once more are shrouded and masked and the sight of skeletons and decaying flesh is forgotten, as the modish figures pace and linger in the unreal pageant of the deliberate dance of deceit.

‘ G. K. C.’



‘WE were young, we were merry, we were very, very wise . . .’ at Oxford in the late ‘nineties and at the beginning of this new century. Some of us, I am afraid, neglected learning in the pursuit of what we knew was fun and believed might be wisdom, and in the event I don’t know that we did any worse, or got less out of our life there, than those who faced Collections with a smile, and greeted the Final Schools with a cheer. We were certainly as much of Oxford, and we used to think that we proved our true Oxford spirit by loving to bring there men and moods, movements and fashions, that were not at all Oxonian in origin. There were little clubs—one I remember in which seven members met and adjudged one another’s compositions in prose and verse. There were undergraduate papers—for a period I edited one, which was saved from bankruptcy by an ingenious advertisement manager who is now wasting his talent in administering the law. Then there was the joy of spotting the newer men in the arts—a sport as exciting and much less expensive than spotting the winners in other and greener fields. A game, too, in which too often the positive backer found he had backed ‘a wrong ‘un’, or even a non-starter. I can remember one really thrilling event. Several of us backed the author of *The Wild Knight*—one Gilbert Keith Chesterton. It was a poet who discovered him, a poet given to the reading of French and Belgian symbolists, but who recognized the



depth and originality of the great anti-decadent, the man whom the white lock of Whistler roused to honourable and dangerous fury I shall not forget the excitement of first reading that little book with its vellum back and blue grey sides. How we loved ‘The Donkey’, pored over ‘The God makers’, and roared aloud that fine war-poem about Joshua and the staying of the sun!

Verily, as I have promised pay I  
Life unto Gibeon, death unto Ai.

I was particularly in love with that, as I was still a little widowed, since Matthew Arnold had robbed me of the right to love *The Lays of Ancient Rome*. (I have since resumed that right.) Then we discovered that one of us knew ‘G. K. C.’ It was the present Registrar-General—S. P. Vivian—who had been at St. Paul’s School with the poet. The obvious thing was for him to ask Chesterton to come to our college debating society, he consented, and I can still remember the murmur of admiration and apprehension on the cab-rank outside the Great Western station as we stood there and pondered over the wisdom of picking our cab with care.

I do not, alas! remember what Mr. Chesterton lectured to us about. I remember the manner of his lecture. It seemed to be written on a hundred pieces of variously shaped paper, written in ink and pencil (of all colours) and in chalk. All the pages were in a splendid and startling disorder, and I remember being at first just a little disappointed. Then the papers were abandoned, and ‘G. K. C.’

talked, and we got more and more interested and pleased. I remember a passage about cathedrals and railway stations which roused opposition; and with opposition and question the real Chesterton broke loose. He will, I am sure, if he ever reads this, forgive me for saying that to myself I whispered, ‘Elephant!’ All day the image had been present with me of something vast and weighty, incredibly simple, incalculably wise, and unquestionably kindly. Foolishly I mourned a certain sluggishness. Then, as I say, came opposition; and suddenly—trunk up, roaring, speeding faster and faster—the wisest of us was pursuing his trifling opponents through quickset hedge and over ploughed fields of argument. How he raced! I know, because of all the opposition none ran faster than I!

‘We were young, we were merry, we were very, very wise . . .’

But we were not so wise as we thought; and ‘G. K. C.’ was wiser. He was wiser because he was simpler. Of all the men of this century, he remains to me the man who is at once most himself, and most willing to admit that there are many powers outside himself, things he does not know, things he cannot see. He is completely himself, because he is never an egotist—for an egotist is a man who tries by spiritual self-advertisement to convince his own soul about his own worth. Chesterton can afford to be personal in his writings, because he is really modest. I know of no modern author who uses the ‘I’ so much, and never gives the reader an impression of conceit, or of arrogance, or of self-importance. He has the jolliest manner, even when he is insulted.

Mr. Arnold Bennett once, in a remark which deserves to get the Five Towns Mug for its fatuousness, refused to consider Mr. Chesterton as an intellectual equal because ' G. K. C. ' was a dogmatist, and therefore possessed ' a second-class intellectual apparatus '. How prettily—it is the only word—' G. K. C. ' retorts on him in *Fancies versus Fads* :

In truth there are only two kinds of people, those who accept dogmas and know it, and those who accept dogmas and do not know it. My only advantage over the gifted novelist lies in my belonging to the former class.

' Doesn't he,' I remember some one saying when ' G. K. C. ' first came to Oxford, ' doesn't he wreath his sword with myrtle ? ' There is, perhaps, less myrtle these days than in the earlier collections of essays. I cannot help thinking that ' G. K. C. ' plays his opponents a little more sadly than was his custom, the times are darker now, it is true, and the enemies to be met more dangerous because they are less serious and less positive. It is the day of the Great Boyg, that shapeless, inchoate, unclutchable monster who spread across and around the path of Peer Gynt. Gallantly Mr. Chesterton deals with one enemy—an enemy which has borrowed a great deal of his effective armour from the moral theology of the Catholic Church. I am amused to notice that, in preferring the popular view that ' dreams go by contraries ' to Freud's nastier elaborations, he has an unexpected ally in Mr. D. H. Lawrence, and how excellent are his comments on the irreverent efforts to drag the world's artists and the world's masterpieces into the service of Freud and Jung :

Lady Macbeth does not suffer as a sleepwalker because she has resisted the impulse to murder Duncan, but rather (by some curious trick of thought), because she has yielded to it. Hamlet's uncle is in a morbid frame of mind not as one would naturally expect, because he has thwarted his own development by leaving his brother alive and in possession, but actually because he has triumphantly liberated himself from the morbid impulse to pour poison in his brother's ear. On the theory of psycho-analysis, as expounded, a man ought to be haunted by the ghosts of all the men he had not murdered. Even if they were limited to those he might have felt a vague fancy for murdering they might make a respectable crowd to follow at his heels. Yet Shakespeare certainly seems to represent Macbeth as haunted by Banquo, whom he removed at one blow from the light of the sun and from his own subconsciousness.

I do not know why I should trouble to define Mr Chesterton's central position when, in his introduction to *Fancies versus Fads*, he has so admirably done that for me.

It is only from a normal standpoint that all the nonsense of the world takes on something of the wild interest of wonderland. After all, the ordinary orthodox person is he to whom the heresies can appear as fantasies. After all, it is we ordinary and humdrum people who can enjoy eccentricity as a sort of elfland, while the eccentrics are too serious even to know that they are elves. When a man tells us that he disapproves of children being told fairy tales, it is we who can perceive that he is himself a fairy. He himself has not the least idea of it. It is only those who have ordinary views who have extraordinary visions.

I have only one criticism to make of this statement of a point of view with which I am in general and cordial agreement. I think Mr Chesterton sometimes forgets that, if the eccentrics are dull, so, alas!

sometimes are the ordinary people.' You may have ordinary views, you may cling to ordinary conventions, and yet this passionate normality may not bring to you the gift of extraordinary vision. I suppose every one who enthusiastically adopts a popular or prevalent point of view discovers that, the ardent Anglo-Catholic meets, at congress or committee, those who hold the same views he holds, and 'My word,' he murmurs, 'surely they are not all as dull and narrow as this!' The ardent Socialist, the passionate Agnostic, the converted Protestant—all have similar experiences. One of the most startling instances is Newman, who could scarcely believe his eyes and ears after he had joined the Roman Communion. We must never be surprised to discover that often the orthodox is as dull as the heretic, the Fascist as stupid as the Bolshevik, the writer of 'lyrics' no brighter than the imagist, the curate as unimaginative as the determinist—for they are all men.

## The Prisoner of God      ~      ~      ~      ~

ALL his life John Donne was a prisoner. In a sense that is true of all men, but of Donne, as of some other great men, it is true in a very special way, for he, all his life, was aware of his bondage and of the masters to whom he was compelled to give allegiance. The common run of men are not so aware. We are complacent and contented, and go about our business with that illusion of freedom that encourages us to idealize our appetites, glorify our weaknesses, and dignify our prejudices. We make haste, directly we are aware of any growth in spiritual stature, to barter the freedom of our will for the imprisonment of comfort, or riches, or the respect of the world, or ambition, or a mean convention. The great men—whether they be artists, or saints, or statesmen, or obscure souls unknown to fame—are different. They mostly, in their youth, it is true, endanger or sell their freedom, but they are quickly and continuously aware of servitude, and their work, in youth, is often the cry of the trapped soul, amazed and indignant at its own folly. John Donne, whether or not we think him supreme as poet or as prose writer, is, at any rate, supreme in this. He is sensitively, morbidly, agonizedly aware of his imprisonment. His early poems show it, when he was testing his youth in the heady air of that wonderful little London made illustrious by the genius of the Elizabethan dramatists. The earlier poetry of that age, except for some of

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Shakespeare, is confident, glad, accepting. Long years after youth and beauty had deserted Elizabeth courtiers and poets praised her as the loveliest and most splendid lady in Europe. It was an age of gorgeous unreality as it is displayed in the poems of Spenser. Donne was trapped by beauty, by the snare of the body, by pleasure and fashion—and he knew himself prisoner and revolted in those poems which are the first in English to be really cynical (once again excepting Shakespeare). He was then, too, a slave to his intellect. His curious, wandering intelligence led him far afield—in what other author of the time can we find references to Dante and Copernicus, to Philip Neri and Ignatius Loyola, to the science of mathematics and to the new discoveries in America?

He adventured on many paths: courtier, lawyer, poet, friend, lover, and then, when he was twenty-eight and his bride seventeen, he married Ann More. He was trapped then in a new way. He had sat easily to circumstance, and had more than the beginnings of a career in his secretaryship to Sir Thomas Egerton, who was Anne's uncle. The secret marriage enraged Ann's father, Donne was dismissed from his position and learnt, through tiresome and penurious years, the strangling imprisonment of misfortune and poverty. His friends tried to help him, but could not. Morton, Dean of Gloucester, offered him a living if he would get ordained, but Donne was not ready. He chafed so against his chains that in 1608—seven years after his marriage—he meditated suicide, and wrote an apology for it. Seven years later he was ordained, at the age of

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forty two, and in 1621 he was given the Deanery of St Paul's; and 'at all festivities of the year, especially at Christmas and Easter, he sent a bounty to the prisons of London, and by his gifts many who were imprisoned for small debts were released'.

John Donne was never released. No one familiar with his works, especially the great sermons, can doubt that. The same note of almost incredulous dissatisfaction with the barriers of time and space that is heard again and again in the sermons was sounded earlier in the poems. Partly under the influence of Walton's biography many students of Donne have made a strict distinction between the satirist and the preacher. Yet it is the same man, the man of tortured imagination, straining to over-leap the restrictions of his temperament and of the world around him.

Donne was never an observer. He was master of life, and, in turn, victim. The modern worship of Donne is due to his extreme divergence from the standard it is the fashion to call Victorian. He is brutal, frank, mystical, and he is always himself in his poems. I do not say that Sir Edmund Gosse proved his case when he endeavoured to read a personal history into nearly all the poems, Donne may or may not be the hero of the terrible poem called 'The Thirteenth Elegy', in which the speaker, involved in his dangerous and intriguing love affair, is given these splendid lines.

Was it not enough that thou didst hazard us  
To paths in love so dark and dangerous,  
And those so ambushed round with household spies,  
And over all thy husband's towering eyes?



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There is no evidence about Donne's early years, except these poems (the date of which we do not certainly know), and Walton's guarded allusions to the great Dean's indiscretions. No one, however, who is sensitive to poetry can deny that in such a poem as 'The Apparition', strong personal passion, bred of personal experience, is speaking. And Donne speaks plainly. There is a good deal of misconception about his 'wittiness', many believe that he is, like Crashaw, over-concocted continuously. He can be as fantastic or as metaphysical as any poet of his day; but in the plain utterance of emotions no English poet has rivalled him at his best. He may never have written one poem perfect from first line to last; his thought or sensation breaks through his poem, he beats angrily at his words, and then suddenly has a phrase which consummately conveys his meaning:

I wonder, by my troth, what thou and I  
Did till we loved?

And

And whilst our souls negotiate there,  
We like sepulchral statues lay,  
All day, the same our postures were,  
And we said nothing, all the day

And .

A bracelet of bright hair about the bone.

And .

A naked, thinking heart that makes no show,  
Is to a woman but a kind of ghost.

Donne is the only poet I know, except Catullus, who made a perfect poem out of hate. The hate in

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some of Shakespeare's sonnets is excusatory, apologetic beside the concentrated fury of 'The Apparition', with its tremendous ending.

And then, poor aspen wretch, neglected, thou,  
Bathed in a cold, quicksilver sweat, wilt be  
    A verier ghost than I  
What I will say I will not tell thee now,  
Lest that preserve thee, and since my love is spent,  
I'd rather thou should'st painfully repent  
Than by my threatenings rest still innocent

The secret of Donne's popularity to day is the quality which made him of little account in the eighteenth century. He is a troubled, vexed, uncertain spirit. What peace and certainty he gained either in love or religion were gained hardly. There is no self-satisfaction about him, either intellectual or emotional, and while no one can accuse the Victorians—or at the least the most typical poets—of intellectual complacency, they were guilty both of emotional and moral complacency. Donne was a European. He had travelled, and his mind never ceased travelling. His imagination and intellect alike kept on an incessant quest, not expecting nor even desiring satisfaction, until and unless it could be obtained mystically. The great Victorians, except Newman and Browning, perhaps, were content to be satisfied. They did not, it seems to us, sufficiently remember that it is only in the experience of eternity that a man has any right to achieve satisfaction, but to stop short of that is to be traitor to the quest on which we are sent. I do not know that many of the moderns are as certain of eternity as Donne was that

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eternity can be experienced ; but they share with him the other truth—that there is no abiding satisfaction to be had from the standards and conventions of the world. When Donne found what he wanted in Faith, he wrote of religion with all the bluntness and directness, and occasionally even all the beauty, with which he had written of love. The author of 'The Apparition' and 'Jealousy' also wrote :

We think that Paradise and Calvary,  
Christ's cross and Adam's tree, stood in one place ;  
Look, Lord, and find both Adams meet in me ,  
As the first Adam's sweat surrounds my face  
May the last Adam's blood my soul embrace.

So in his purple wrapp'd, receive me Lord ,  
By these his thorns give me this other crown ,  
And, as to others' souls I preached Thy Word,  
Be this my text, my sermon to mine own—  
'Therefore that he may raise, the Lord throws down.'

Donne was converted. We wish those who investigate religious phenomena would study such cases as his instead of the more emotional instances which figure largely in their books. Some critics are inclined, perhaps, to exaggerate Donne's morbidity. For him, as for most intense natures, religion was a simple matter—a matter essentially of the whole man, and not a departmental or parochial business. Hence, no doubt, his fundamental lack of interest in the 'religious questions' of his day, the controversies between Papist and Protestant. He entered into them, but his writing on such subjects never has the fire and the flaming energy of his writings on God, on salvation, and on hell.

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There are, I believe, those who profess to be able to get a purely aesthetic pleasure out of Donne's prose. I do not envy them. I am reminded of John Keble's retort to Hurrell Froude: 'It is as if you called the Day of Judgment a pretty sight.' The sermons were sweated out of him, and his sweat was blood. I know nothing in English, except some of Donne's poems, in which there is so tremendous a mixture of intellectual energy and spiritual force. Donne had at his command an instrument as shattering as it was subtle. His thought can be as fine-drawn as Newman's, but he thinks with his whole body. It is as though Charles Spurgeon had the brain of Blaise Pascal. The style presses on one. He will begin a sermon with a few short sentences, introduce some almost conversational argument and elucidation, then gradually work up to a vast, vehement, almost endless paragraph of a sentence which breaks at the end like the tumultuous waters of a tidal wave. Here is an extract from his last sermon, *Death's Duell*, preached when he knew he was to die soon.

And though the Apostel would not say, *Morimur*, that whilst in the body, we are dead, yet he saies *Peregrinamur*, whilst we are in the body, we are but in a pilgrimage, and we are absent from the Lord. He might have said *dead*, for the whole world is but an universal churchyard, but one common grave, and the life and motion that the greatest persons have in it, is but as the shaking of buried bodies in their graves by an earthquake. That which we call life is but *Hebdomada mortium*, a week of death, seven daies, seven periods of our life spent in dying, a dying seven times over, and ther's an end. Our birth dies in infancy, and our infancy dies in youth, and youth, and the rest die in age, and age

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also dies, and determines all. Nor do all these, youth out of infancy, or age out of youth, arise so, as a Phoenix out of, the ashes of another Phoenix formerly dead, but as a wasp, or a serpent out of carrion, or as a snake out of dung, our youth is worse than our infancy, and our age worse than our youth, our youth is hungry and thirsty after those sins which our infancy knew not, and our age is sorry and angry that it cannot pursue those sins which our youth did. And besides, all the way so many deaths, that is, so many deadly calamities accompany every condition, and every period of this life, as that death itself would be an ease to them that suffer them. Upon this sense doth *Job* wish, that God had not given him an issue from the first death, from the womb. *Wherefore hast thou brought me forth out of the womb? O that I had given up the ghost, and no eye had seen me, I should have been, as though I had not been.*

For Donne it was always difficult to be a Christian, and he plucked, as his devotions and some of his sacred poems show, out of that difficulty a more splendid happiness. He was a man of the Renaissance by birth and by nature, but his intellect and his soul gave him no peace until he resolved the problems of mortality in an act of faith. How fine is the end of his Christmas sermon, 'at Paul's' in 1624

As no man can deceive God, so God can deceive no man, God cannot live in the darke himselfe, neither can he leave those, who are his, in the darke. If he be with thee, he will make thee see, that he is with thee, and never goe out of thy sight, till he have brought thee, where thou canst never goe out of his.

The great sermon on falling out of the hands of God has no parallel in English literature until we come to Newman, who surely must have read Donne

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in Alford's edition, so nearly does he translate the dean's sombre periods into his own sharper rhetoric. Most of Donne's critics have not understood that the man who knew and resented his imprisonment to the senses, to the intellect ('When wee are mov'd to seeme religious Only to vent wit, Lord, deliver us!'), to circumstance, felt that in the faith which quickened and glowed after his ordination he had found a prison in which he could rejoice. He had discovered that the natural prison for the aspiring soul was the supernatural, that man is so made that bondage alone is the true condition of his longings and desires, which, in a vacant licence or a meaner prison, can never be satisfied or fulfilled. He had, at last, a jailer 'whose service is perfect freedom'. Other bonds still galled him. His pride, his fear of bodily death, and its disgusting accompaniments of dissolution and decay and the one thing in which all his other faults are included, his tendency to despair, to accidie. He experienced, more than most of the mystics, the desolation of the dark night of the soul, and feared abandonment though he clung to his faith. Here his own intellectual ingenuity, his 'wit' alarmed him. He could find reasons for anything and found them, in lonely moments, for his own damnation. But always in the end his sermons come back, as a great tide covers the bare and desolate places of the shore, and remember his felicity as the prisoner of God manacled by the mercies of his Saviour, secure from the dissolute liberty of eternal death.

## Samuel Pepys ♡ ♡ ♡ ♡ ♡ ♡

A SCHOOL of critics who have never known much about life and have forgotten what they knew—not that here their knowledge was extensive—about literature, insists that with the writing of *Ulysses* by Mr. James Joyce an entirely new thing came into the world of letters. Conveniently they ignore the great autobiographies of the world. Conveniently they assume—and it is a monstrous assumption—that the more obscene things in *Ulysses*, the filthier and fouler thoughts and actions and fancies of Bloom and his friends, could be paralleled in the lives of all men and women. I imagine that Mr. Joyce would never make so absurd a claim for his book. It seems to me patent from his treatment that he never would pretend that the life he pictures, the characters he exhibits, are normal. It is precisely their abnormality which enrages him, he is like a doctor discussing disease and the ways of the diseased, and only implicitly illustrating the lives and ways of the healthy. The only great difference between such a book as Mr. Joyce's and books such as St. Augustine's *Confessions*, Rousseau's *Confessions*, Pepys' *Diary*, and Casanova's *Memoirs* is this: Mr. Joyce—we needn't discuss here whether he himself belongs to the class or not—is dealing with people whose main interest in life is exhibitionism. These people are so convinced of the vehement importance of their own egos that they cannot really conceive, in their heart of hearts, anything of greater importance or

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interest either in life or art. The disease is an old one, but never until our own age has it attacked so many people, or people of such intelligence and ability. Never before now has it been presented except as the frankly ridiculous and pitiable condition it is. Viewed in the light of eternity all human vices and sins and vanities are no doubt more than a little ridiculous, but about pride and ambition and lust for conquest there does hover a certain dignity—these things are the shadows of aspirations. About exhibitionism there is nothing that is not essentially contemptible. It dissolves the reality of human intercourse. It mocks the truth of our knowledge and love of our fellows. It is monstrous in its hidden pretence that the ‘I’ is the ‘all’, and that not man but one individual is the measure of all things. All modern art is rotten with this self-regarding vice. The novelty is that men take it seriously, and discuss it, not as a symptom of mental and moral weakness, but as a quality in art.

It would be absurd to deny that this fatuity has not been occasionally found before in literature. It is very evident in Rousseau's *Confessions*, and it can be found, strongly mixed with the more human quality of vanity, in Casanova. But before this age nearly all artists had some belief in some God, and however conceited may be the self-examination in the eyes of God, it can never, so long as the eternal Spectator is remembered, be degraded into mere exhibitionism. Even when it was most strongly present, as in Rousseau, it was a mood of his character, not a cancer slowly usurping all the normal functions of mind and soul. It was something which was



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subordinate in its hold on the person, not completely devastating it

No clearer instance of this can be found than Samuel Pepys. The mystery of his diary will always remain a mystery. Whether it was mainly a confession, a boast, or an apology; whether it was written for posterity, had they the interest and the skill to read his cypher, we shall never know. I have conjectured myself that, misled by the brutality of some of the references to his wife, and by the looseness of his life, we have probably ignored the most likely motive which led him to write that amazing document. No doubt, as he writes, the intrinsic interest of many of the incidents, the position of the people he met, his own ungovernable curiosity about men and things—all these take hold of his pen and engage his undivided attention. But it was not for them, I believe, he began it. I believe he had a very strong and sincere affection for Mrs. Pepys, and an idea of the married relationship (in matters of intellectual and spiritual companionship) rather above the average. On the other hand, he *was* average, and he was below the average in pluck. So his attitude to his wife is consciously—not naturally—superior, and when he is unfaithful to her he will not think of confessing his fault. So he starts a diary, intending one day, when his passions are better controlled, or age has brought wisdom and decency (for the diary is of what we should call his youth), to tell the woman who was his heart's companion about his faults and his infidelities. He was one of those men—not an uncommon type—whose deepest affections seemed to live apart, a man—it

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seems wicked and paradoxical to us, but would have seemed natural to Montaigne—whose respect for his wife allowed him to be unfaithful to her and yet to desire one day to make confession to her of those actions and thoughts which he had the sense and honesty to know his Elizabeth would bitterly resent. I know this theory that the diary was written for Elizabeth may appear fantastic; but it is worth noticing that Pepys did not begin it till three years after his marriage; and he ended, in fear of damaging his eyesight, six months before Elizabeth's death. He never married again, though he was only thirty-seven when he was widowed, and he never made a new start on his diary, although his eyesight recovered and was good enough for much other writing.

There is also one other argument in favour of this explanation of the diary: it explains also the extreme difference in interest and attractiveness between Pepys' diary and his letters. The letters belong to the last four years of Pepys' life. They could not be without interest, and no lover of the diary will be able to do without them; but it would be absurd to pretend that their fascination approaches that of the work which has made Pepys one of the immortals of English literature. They are, of course, the letters of an old man, while the diary is that of a young one. Many of them are not so intimate; while intimacy is the main note of the diary. They are the letters of a man who has arrived, while the diary is that of a man whose career and fame are in the making, and the work of endeavour is commonly more entertaining than the work of success. Yet none of these reasons, I think, adequately explains

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the great gap between the letters and the diary; it is only explicable on the assumption that Pepys wrote the diary, not as a piece of exhibitionism, but for the one person for whom in his own odd, vain, selfish way he had a vehement attachment.

The letters in Mr. J. R. Tanner's collection vary in interest remarkably. Some of the most curious pass between Pepys, Mr Tollett, and Isaac Newton on the earth-shaking question, 'Which has the easier task, viz A, in his undertaking to throw one six at least at one throw with 6 dice, or B, in his to throw two sixes at least at one throw with 12?' There are letters about his health. he still took a minute interest in the details of any illness which afflicted him. There are letters to and from John Evelyn, who becomes a real friend to Pepys. In these and in other letters Pepys' zeal as a collector is once more shown. it will be remembered that in the diary he refers with great pride to a painted crucifix he had bought, the possession of which brought him into trouble as a crypto-Papist. He buys foreign books and prints, and his nephew is asked to buy 'religious prints, and in particular of habits, in your passage through Spain and Portugal, where I fancy the bigotry of these nations may lead them to absurd heresies. Or if there be anything else in graving, singularly relating to these countries, whether as to their buildings, manners, or aught else, and particularly of their only royal sport of *Juego de Toro*, pray don't let it 'scape you'. The friendliest and most affectionate letters are those between Pepys and this nephew, John Jackson, after these the best are, perhaps, those from and to Evelyn. In two especially

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we see the character of these two diarists Evelyn in his letter predicted the end of the world and delivered (as he admits) a sermon on this Nation,

so atheistical, false and unsteady, so covetous, selfe interested, impudently detracting, and uncharitable, ingratchfull, lewd, and luxurious, in summe, so universally vitious, dissolute and perverted

Pepys, in acknowledging this epistle, is lost in admiration of its 'glorious matter'.

It looks to me like a seraphic *How d'ye* from one already entered into the regions you talk of in it, and who sent me this for a *viaticum* towards my speeding thither after him Which, as the world now is and (as ?) you have so justly described, and being bereft, (as I now am) of the very uppermost of my mortal felicitys here, in your conversation and that of any few virtuous friends more, I should in very good faith much rather choose to obey you in by leading, than staying to follow you

An incurably likeable little man! Not of great character, or independence or force, but with something eager, friendly, affectionately inquisitive which makes it hard for the student to resist him.

## The Real Stevenson      ♪   ♪   ♪   ♪

IT was no accident which made Stevenson, in search of a profession which would satisfy his father, turn his attention to the law. By that action he admitted, consciously or not, that his bent was not only towards literature but towards advocacy. Even in his poems—for instance, the well-known prayer against despondency or the lines for children on the happy fullness of the world—he is stating a case. In his prose works the same tendency is far more evident. His control over his fictitious characters is always imperfect, because he will suddenly see what a glorious case he can make out for the unlikely ones, and he deserts creation and expression for advocacy and a passionate partisanship. The essays—especially those which win the suffrages of youth—are all speeches for the prosecution or the defence. This trait makes him often monstrously unfair, as in the essay on Villon; sometimes he seems even hypocritical, as in the essay on Burns, until one remembers that a good lawyer will attack with the more vehemence faults and follies to which he has an inclination. He knows more about them. Very few distinguished lawyers are, we imagine, deeply tempted to commit murder, and there are few first-rate speeches delivered in the prosecution of murderers, many in their defence. The great forensic attacks are made on offenders guilty of the more ordinary crimes for which most of us have a latent capacity. man is roused to a sense of danger, to the fact that

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his ordered society is at the mercy of instincts to which the criminal gives play, and it is his own uncontrolled self that he sees and attacks in the dock

Beside his appetite for a legal advocacy Stevenson had as well a craving for preaching, also fully satisfied in his books—and the preacher is even more at the mercy of his own potential experiences than the lawyer. The extraordinary futility of so much mediaeval preaching and writing about women is undoubtedly due to the fact that the ecclesiastical moralists knew nothing about women, and had no normal, healthy experience of sexual life. The same men who talked about women as if they were a mixture of the worm from hell and the potion of Aphrodite's pharmacy, wrote the sanest stuff about usury and theft and injustice, envy, pride, and uncharitableness. For they knew precisely the character of those sins. Lawyer, then, and preacher was Stevenson, as well as artist, and to these gifts he added another temperamental quality which was responsible for many of his virtues and most of his faults—an incurable impulsiveness.

The official biography, the more orthodox appreciations of Stevenson, tend to leave out the impulsiveness—they may not omit the fact that it was part of his make up, but they invariably minimize its effect. For all his good intentions, for all his determination to keep clear of the traditions—rather hagiographic traditions—Mr. Steuart in his book on R. L. S. makes the same mistake. His book was written avowedly to destroy the portrait of the 'seraph in chocolate'

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Reticences, evasions, suppressions, trimmings, then (at the time, that is, of Mr Balfour's Life) perhaps appropriate are no longer desirable or excusable. Stevenson has ceased to be a private family possession set on a domestic pedestal for privileged views, and is relegated to History to be judged by her impartial standards . . . the time has come for an authentic biography, written not with less sympathy or appreciation, but with ampler knowledge, sounder understanding and a greater measure of independence than was possible for Mr Graham Balfour.

Mr. Stenart had access to unpublished and privately printed documents, he talked with old friends of Stevenson's; he made some valuable investigations of his own; - yet the life which he wrote does not seem to me to add much to our understanding of the real Stevenson. Nor was Mr Stenart's lack of matter atoned for by any felicity of style or skill in portraiture. He indulged far too freely in picturesque supposition, and wrote an English sometimes simply bad, sometimes unintelligible. It is quite impossible to extract any meaning from such sentences as these: 'The unpressible Stevenson promptly took her sentiments as something more than maternal. Indeed he could have scarcely been mistaken.' Why not? 'Stevenson himself described it (his marriage) as "a sort of marriage in extremis"'. And such, in truth, it was. The bride was then already a grandmother.' It is distressing to find an author of Mr. Stenart's experience writing 'phenomenal speed' when he means 'remarkable speed', or indulging in such hideous weeds of language as, 'In the islands his name was one to conjure with, not figuratively but literally'. 'Louis, who had ever a *flair* for the

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limelight, was 'seized with the seven devils of scepticism', or 'Stevenson, somewhat reticent, or, it may be, less gifted than some of his predecessors in the amatory art'

The most important of Mr Stuart's contributions to Stevenson biography were not altogether new. In their main outlines, at least, they had already been printed by certain private societies. These privately printed documents go to prove that Stevenson, when he was a young man, took an interest in the night life and the low life of Edinburgh. While on these excursions the romantic youth, already in trouble at home for his religious heresies, made friends with a prostitute, Kate Drummond. Mr Stuart writes rhetorically and with a rather tiresome sentimentality about this Highland woman

Her name—was not 'Claire', that being in the most literal sense a *nom de guerre*. How 'Claire' drifted into his reputable haunts from the purity of the Highlands may be conjectured, but is not known. Probably hers was the old story of a beautiful girlhood, a betrayal of innocence, and a tragic end. That she brought with her into those noisome dens something of the charm of her race, something of the pure air and wholesomeness of her native hills, there is every reason to believe. She was scarcely twenty at the time of their meeting—which was as casual as such meetings are apt to be. The result was a passionate love romance, as passionate, perhaps, as anything in the annals of literature.

And so on, *ad nauseam*. We would willingly exchange all this rhodomontade for a few dates, and it is unfortunate that Mr Stuart was prevented—presumably by copyright laws—from printing the letters on which he relies. He does not tell us how



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long Stevenson's association with 'Claire' lasted, but merely that he desired to marry her, and apparently had the youthful ingenuousness to ask his father to finance the marriage. No one should overstress the significance of this episode in Stevenson's life. It is surely a commonplace of romantic youth, the desire to rescue an 'unfortunate' from her surroundings, to pick a pearl out of the dunghheap. That the experience made a very great impression on Stevenson there is no evidence. Nor is his behaviour that of a man inspired by a great passion. After all, men passionately in love do not, at the bidding of a parent, desert their happiness; they go out and try to work for the beloved, or are even, as was George Gissing, prepared to starve with her. What is of interest and importance in this story is that it shows that Thomas Stevenson was not the bigoted old gentleman pictured in earlier records, he did not cut off Robert's income because Robert professed Darwinism. He simply refused to assist his son to marry a harlot—assistance which only a very exceptional father would be disposed to give.

Mr. Steuart, in some later chapters, asserted that Stevenson was not chaste before marriage. This is the kind of fact which, even if true, only seems important to the discoverer. It does not help us at all to appreciate Stevenson the author, and it does not really add to our understanding of Stevenson the man. For the 'incontrovertible testimony' which Mr. Steuart said he possessed, but did not give his readers, refers to a period of Stevenson's life when he was still in character a boy—and an impulsive boy—to a time when his actions were still reactions,

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to a time when his misdeeds are of about the same importance as his errors in theology Mr Steuart, that is, made the mistake of considering Stevenson as a great man in his youth, whereas he was only a precocious boy, unformed, unstable, easily influenced, facile and indiscriminate It would be too much to say that he ever became a strong character, there is no record, unless we make an exception of Leslie Stephen, that any intelligent man or woman ever disliked him, most of his acquaintances were violently in love with him Universal popularity of this kind is one of the few positive signs of a fundamentally weak character, especially in the artist, to whom, as well as to the saints, was uttered the warning 'Woe unto you when all men speak well of you'

Some critics believe that Stevenson never became a man, we believe they are wrong He became adult, slowly and with a great many growing pains, after he fell in love with Fanny van der Grift Osbourne To this remarkable woman Mr Steuart is extremely unjust It is the simple truth that she made Stevenson The Stevenson of the essays, a weak imitator of Emerson, a pretty stylist, a mere pleader for different attitudes towards life—none of them understood profoundly, or held seriously—that Stevenson yields to the Stevenson of the three or four immortal stories, the Stevenson of the later essays the Stevenson of Samoa There were if we exclude his family, two important persons in Stevenson's life before this—Fleeming Jenkin and Henley Jenkin's criticism was certainly good for R L S, and Mr Steuart was the first biographer, so far as

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I know, who made enough of it. Henley was a good friend, a boon companion; but his influence on Stevenson the writer was never of any benefit, and would have been, but for Mrs. Stevenson, a disaster. We may think that Mrs. Stevenson was too hard on Henley, but she was fighting not only for her husband, but for the artist, Henley was only fighting for the boon companion. All through their life Mrs. Stevenson was a help to her husband, never diverting his talents into useless enterprises, encouraging him when he was depressed, writing with him (and very capably) in some of the most entertaining of his light work. No critic of literature can fail to notice the great difference, the enormous improvement in Stevenson's writing after he had fallen in love. He is freer, less mannered, surer of himself, and gradually becomes interested in people rather than in poses.

Yet not even Mrs. Stevenson could completely remake R. L. S. He remained the preacher and the lawyer, and he remained impulsive. The last characteristic she discouraged, if at all, only by the spectacle of an impulsiveness so vehement that it made him seem capricious and Henley's seem sullen, the other two temperamental characteristics she was sweating out of him. We do not mean she set out on her work consciously, except in so far as to accomplish it she was forced to weed out R. L. S.'s friends and acquaintances. The important thing for him was that his wife loved him, and did not merely like him. She wanted him, that is, to be more than a good companion, more than a pleasant husband and enchanting stepfather, she wanted him to do his utmost and be the self she knew under all his facile

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amiabilities and cheap affectations. Here, surely, and not in any uncanny power of fascination, is the secret of her success with his parents. They, too, wanted their beloved Robert to be and do the best of which he was capable. His father was not, after all, so wrong in his annoyed condemnation of Robert's wasted days in Edinburgh. It is no use citing Burns, or Villon, or Verlaine, or other vagabonds of genius and poetry. They proved the value of their vagabondage by turning their experience to artistic use. Stevenson could not do this, and it is possible for a man to know his work from end to end and never suspect R. L. S. of any more serious offence than respectability.

That is not a complaint one could make against Burns. The fact that Stevenson never used these early adventures which Mr. Steuart stressed, and in which some modern psychologists would find the key to his literary character, is a proof of their extreme insignificance. The real Stevenson is, after all, more truly shown in Graham Balfour's biography and in Mr. Chesterton's essay than in any other book, for the real Stevenson was a creation of Mrs. Stevenson's. Gradually the lawyer and the preacher became more and more subdued, under her influence, to the artist. It would be foolish to deny that the two earlier manifestations ever produced good work, the preacher gave us *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, one of the few good allegories in English. The lawyer gave us the letter on Father Damien, which is, with Swinburne's *Under the Microscope*, the best piece of vituperative literature of the nineteenth century. But neither these, nor other improving and apologetic

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work, can seriously compare with *Treasure Island* or *The Master of Ballantrae*, with *Kidnapped*, with the best of the short stories or with *Wear of Hermiston*.

Stevenson died young, after a life in which, whatever else was lacking, great courage was always present. That he bulked so large to his contemporaries, that he is still a subject of eager controversy, that as a man and author, he still attracts vehement partisans and critical detractors he owes to the energy and the love of Fanny van der Grist, whom he first saw in 1876 through the lamplit window of the little inn at Grez.

## Henrik Ibsen    ♪    ♪    ♪    ♪    ♪    ♪

### I

STRANGE as seems to us to day the extreme horror and disgust roused by the first production of Ibsen's plays in London, I believe, did another Ibsen take the stage, there would be a repetition of that disgraceful and unintelligent outcry. Many explanations and excuses were made, but the real reason was never plainly stated. Ibsen was denounced for treating subjects unsuitable to dramatic treatment—this from critics who must have dreamt often through performances of 'Hamlet', 'Measure for Measure', and 'King Lear'. He was suspect because he had been acclaimed, in spite of his angry protests, as the apostle of feminism and other dangerous tendencies. Finally, the more candid of his abusers admitted that they could not bear the provincial atmosphere in his dramas, reducing dramatic criticism to the snobbish level of finding the conventions of Scandinavia intrinsically odder and more absurd than the conventions of Paris and London. None of these reasons really account for the natural and spontaneous anger which filled the warm heart of such a burdened theatre goer as Clement Scott. The real reason for the hatred felt for Ibsen's social dramas had another and simpler origin. The plays were full of real people, and that was a spectacle which seemed obscene to the London playgoer at the end of the nineteenth century. Of

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course the English theatre did possess plays in which the characters had a certain proximate reality, but it was a reality which was strictly subordinate to the conventions of the theatre. Robertson, Pinero, Henry Arthur Jones had all written plays in which the characters were excessively life-like; but they never wrote a play in which the characters were alarmingly and dynamically alive. Their creatures' liveliness began, we knew, when the curtain rose, and ended as it fell, Ibsen's people had existed, often for long years, before ever the play opened, and continued their lives afterwards in our imagination, in our wondering memories, in our anxious questionings. It was that which shocked and distressed the critic and the playgoer. Suddenly to realize that the theatre could be turned into a place of agony, of desperate pity and of ashamed recollection, could become something in which there was demanded from its frequenters not the mood of the diner-out or the gossip, but the temper of self-examination, of social inquiry, of religious exultation or despair—this was the outrage which was thought to be intolerable. For Clement Scott to sit through a performance of 'Ghosts' was as if a man who had hired a window to watch a festival procession and some elaborate fireworks, should to his horror find himself present at the opening of the tombs, and hear instead of the music of the band the insistent and unescapable blast from the trumpets of the Day of Judgment.

# Henrik Ibsen

## II

It is impossible properly to appreciate or understand the purpose of Ibsen's social dramas without an intimate acquaintance with, at the least, his poems 'The Pretenders', 'Brand', 'Peer Gynt', and 'Emperor and Galilean'. While it is true that no dramatist of last century, and few of any century, had a more perfect knowledge of the stage and stagecraft than Ibsen, it is also true that his genius was independent of the stage. He was not, as Molière was and Lope de Vega, a man whose genius might have found no artistic outlet if he had not had the stage, he was a man of great creative genius who chose the stage as the best medium for the expression of his ideas, and the means which gave his enormous talent for making men and women the widest possible scope. It gave him more scope than the novel would have done, for Ibsen's genius was in origin lyrical and intense, he had not the epic poet's or the novelist's keen interest in the spectacle, in the procession of life. He is of all great dramatists the most subjective, distinct and vivid as all his people are, strictly as he keeps himself, as a separate person, off the stage, he is yet the matrix of all his people from Brand and Hakon to Rita and Solness and Rubek, and all his characters, either willingly, or by compulsion, or by evasion, share his own sense of the importance of the spiritual life. I cannot understand those critics who would separate the Ibsen of the lyrics and of 'Peer Gynt' from the Ibsen of 'Ghosts', of 'Rosmersholm', and 'The Master Builder'. I have read nearly all his work



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through several times; and whether it is read in chronological order or haphazard, I always find myself repeating Ibsen's own claim that his work is a unity, that there is nothing in 'When We Dead Awaken' which is not implicit in the lyrics, in 'Brand' and in 'Peer Gynt'. Ibsen's work as a poet can never be estimated except by those who can read the Danish originals. The speed, the rhythmic variety, the ingenious and elaborate rhyme-schemes of 'Peer Gynt' might be reproduced in Italian or Spanish, but can never be rendered successfully in English, the simple metre of 'Brand' presents fewer difficulties, and both Dr Herford's and Mr. Garrett's versions are extremely good examples of poetic translation. Some of the lyrics have also been rendered by Mr. Garrett, and preserve in his version not a little of the force of the original. In one poem, 'The Miser', written when Ibsen was twenty-three years of age, the poet in a strange way predicts his life work in delving into the hidden places of the human heart -

Beetling rock, with roar and smoke,  
Break before my hammer-stroke!  
Deeper I must thrust and lower  
Till I hear the ring of ore

From the mountain's unplumbed night  
Deep amid the gold veins bright,  
Diamonds lure me, rubies beckon,  
Treasure-board that none may reckon.

. . . . .

Fondly did I cry when first  
Into the dark place I burst.

# Henrik Ibsen

' Answer spirits of the middle  
Earth my life's unending riddle '—

Still the spirits of the deep  
Unrevealed their answer keep  
Still no beam from out the gloomy  
Cavern rises to illumine me

Have I erred ? Does this way lead  
Not to clarity indeed ?  
If above I seek to find it  
By the glare my eyes are blinded

Downward then The depths are best  
There is immemorial rest  
Heavy Hammer burst as bidden  
To the heart nook of the hidden !

The injunction of the last verse might be Ibsen's motto. In the historical dramas he was already (in *The Pretenders* ) turning aside from the pure saga and the pageantry and investigating into the hidden motives of men and women. In *Brand* Ibsen first produced a work which can safely challenge comparison with the great poetic dramas of the past. This moving finely drawn deeply conceived portrait of the fanatic who is more than a fanatic of the man whose religion it is to preach a God whose love is not easy and comfortable but stern and terrible, remains Ibsen's most distinguished piece of male portraiture. I do not mean that *Peer Gynt* and many men in the prose dramas have not equal skill and greater variety but *Brand* is drawn in the great manner whether in scorn in preaching in irony in affectionate conversation with Agnes, in agony after he has once more dared to lose all or

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in his final desperation, he is a figure of heroic size, a figure which immediately recalls Savonarola, or even more, perhaps, our own Bishop Latimer. I doubt if there is any other instance in literature of so remarkable a feat as the writing and publication of 'Peer Gynt' only a year after the completion of 'Brand'. Ibsen was at the time in Italy, and this vivid, swift drama, incomparable in the speed of its changes, in its rapid flights from shadow to sun, in its glorious high spirits, must surely have been due partly to the excitement felt by this man, brought up in gloomy valleys, on his transference to the light and laughter of Italy. For many 'Peer Gynt' will always remain Ibsen's greatest work. He himself believed that of all his books it was 'the least likely to be understood out of Scandinavia' a strange opinion to hold of one of the most universal poems ever written. Peer Gynt himself is not Everyman; but he is a side of Everyman, an aspect of human character of which all candid men and women are aware. Every time I read 'Peer Gynt' I rejoice more in its unexampled richness. I would not have the play a line less, nor sacrifice any of those changes, infinitely variable and touchingly the same, which the rascal undergoes. As 'Peer Gynt' is everybody's favourite, so 'Emperor and Galilean' is the most disregarded of Ibsen's greater works. These two long dramas on Julian are the only works of his which make one wonder whether, after all, Ibsen might not have written a novel. Certainly the book would be more popular as a novel. I do not know if it has ever been performed, certainly its large number of characters and the extreme length of the

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acts would tax any theatre very severely. Much as I admire the work, I think in the second part Julian has been too much for his dramatist. Ibsen allows the emperor to be as great a bore as he was in real life, still, up to the end of the third act of the second part, this work of Ibsen's contains some of his finest things. The character drawing is as firm as ever; he does not allow himself to slacken even in the portrayal of the slightest people, while the portraits of Basil, of Gregory and of Julian have that mixture of audacity and exquisiteness which is Ibsen's prerogative. 'Emperor and Galilean' was published in 1873, four years later came the first of the social dramas ('The League of Youth', published in 1869, though important to students of dramatic method, need not be otherwise mentioned), 'The Pillars of Society'.

### III

The old beauty is no longer beautiful, and the new truth is no longer true,' cries Julian the Emperor. When Ibsen turned from poetry to prose it was in an effort, which succeeded beyond any expectation, to force the truth of poetry into his modern drama. He had to sacrifice something of beauty, and he never quite reconciled himself to that sacrifice. I believe that the main lesson of all the plays is that a man must not sacrifice love to any lesser desire, for if he does so he sacrifices truth as well as love. That is Brand's error, that he believes truth can be preached apart from love, it is Borkman's error, and it is Rubek's. Yet there is, too, a secondary,

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symbolic meaning in the lives of Solness, of Borkman, and of Rubek. Solness turns from the building of churches to the building of houses for human beings, Borkman sacrifices domestic love and happiness to the ideal of big business, Rubek turns from the making of ideal sculpture to the making of portrait busts. So Ibsen had turned from his lyrical, his poetical dramas to the prose of the great series of social dramas. Yet he accomplished in this way something otherwise impossible. The prose plays shocked Europe because here once more were live people on the stage. This is certain; and yet all the time the theatres of Europe were all familiar with the live people of Shakespeare, and their intense problems. Why did the situation in 'Ghosts' seem so much more terrible than the situation in 'Measure for Measure'? Why did Rosmer stun and shame audiences which could smile and yawn at the agony of Hamlet? Why should Hedda Gabler appear heartless to a generation familiar with Iago, or Rebecca West ruthless to people who knew Lady Macbeth, or Mrs Almers indecently sensual to playgoers who admired Cleopatra? First, most people cannot listen intelligently to poetry, even when it is (as it is occasionally) intelligently spoken, and secondly, the whole presentation of Shakespearean plays under the Lyceum tradition tended to make actors and audiences alike treat them as belonging to some remote and long-dead past. Ibsen knew this. He was obstinately poet—but he sacrificed the glamour and delight of poetic expression in order that he could get poetic truth emphasized. A great deal of nonsense has been written about the difference

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between the poet and the ordinary man There is really no difference in kind The poet differs from the cynic, from the pedant, from the precision, he does not differ from the ordinary man He is, on the contrary, his representative, and he is intensely and more continuously what the ordinary man is weakly and at long separated intervals The poet believes intensely in the soul of man, he is impatient of all that would shackle and harass the soul, he cares nothing for the State except as a convenience, he knows that nothing matters but truth and love, God and human relationship Early in 1871 Ibsen expressed to Brandes his creed from which he never deflected

I shall never agree to make liberty synonymous with political liberty What you call liberty I call liberties and what I call the struggle for liberty is nothing but the constant, living assimilation of the idea of freedom It is a benefit to possess the franchise, the right of self taxation etc but for whom is it a benefit? For the citizen not for the individual Now there is absolutely no reasonable necessity for the individual to be a citizen On the contrary, the State is the curse of the individual With what is the strength of Prussia bought? With the merging of the individual in the political and geographical concept The writer makes the best soldier 'The State must be abolished' In that revolution I will take part

The vehemence of Ibsen's philosophic anarchism is no doubt partly due to local conditions and to the times in which he lived, but it does, I contend, represent a normal sentiment of the normal European Ibsen was merely in this, as in other things, ahead of most of the statesmen and politicians of his day

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He desired a government which should govern imperceptibly, a tyranny if need be, either of autocrat or socialistic benevolence, which would leave normal men and women, of whom the poet is the representative, that freedom lacking which life becomes mechanical and man a drudge. His prose plays are full of this, and it accounts for the excessive preponderance of notable women. Ibsen was no feminist in the sense that he believed that one sex had any necessary superiority over the other. He merely observed that women were freer, less hobbled by political and social conventions, more aware of the inalienable needs of the soul. Ibsen's men speak and think of what is due to them or due from them; his women speak and think of what they really need. The soul's genuine needs must be satisfied before one can pay any attention to obligations. That is the plain lesson of *Nora*, of *Mrs. Alving*, of *Stockmann*, of *Rebecca West*, of *Ellida*, of *Solness* and *Hulda*, of *Asta* and *Rita*, of *Ella Rentheim*, of *Irene* and *Rubek*. Two plays seem to be free from this constant preoccupation. *Hedda Gabler* is a perfect representation of a woman who never has any needs, only appetites and temperamental caprices; her suicide is really only the declaration that she was dead, as so many modern people are, from the beginning of the saga. In *The Wild Duck* Ibsen, angry at his more fatuous admirers, put his lesson the other way round. Poor, weak, greedy Hjalmar Ekdal has satisfied his needs, and helped Gina, however unconsciously, to satisfy hers. Gregers compels him to recognize his duty to truth; and the desire for truth, if it is to be fruitful, must be felt as a need, not

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accepted as a duty In a sense Ibsen might be called the dramatist of one idea, but it is an idea, a conviction, a creed, and with it he did more in variety and abundance than other dramatists contrive with their fancies and their opinions His theatre is, I believe rather out of fashion at the moment, and I am not surprised He is too hard, too certain, too religious for an age which is soft and vague and frivolous Also he is, except for those who like the east wind and the mountain top, a bleak author There are flowers in the prose plays and brief patches of *sunlight humour*, but they are few, and we are not encouraged to linger by them There is little laughter in the valleys, and the wine of Italy did not often colour his scenes he will take us with him into those caverns of which he wrote in 1851, or he will take us Upwards Towards the peaks Towards the stars And towards the vast silence, and neither of these invitations will ever be more popular than the invitation to any other kind of arduous spiritual exertion But to those who know the loveliness of the light in the darkness and can breathe, full lunged, the cold air on the summit, Henrik Ibsen will remain one of the most satisfying and tonic of the great authors of Europe



## Shelley      ◊      ◊      ◊      ◊      ◊      ◊      ◊

I SUPPOSE one of the greatest losses to literary history is that Mary Shelley was never able to write that Life of her husband which the death of Sir Timothy in 1811 left her free to attempt. Up till then, with that obstinate determination to spoil loveliness which was Timothy's only strong, positive characteristic, the old man forbade her to publish anything biographical on pain of losing her pittance as Shelley's widow. The result is that we still lack, and are likely, unless some genius arises, to go on lacking, a book which can resolve for us the character of one of our greatest and most entrancing poets. Neither M. André Maurois nor Mrs. Campbell can claim to have filled the gap. Each of these authors, especially M. Maurois, is extraordinarily successful in the sketches of Shelley's friends, relatives and acquaintances, each succeeds in getting something of the atmosphere of the time and society in which Shelley rebelled, and Mrs. Campbell tries very hard, and occasionally succeeds, in showing us that energetic, virile, keen-minded, scholarly poet who has been so ludicrously and lamentably hidden from us by some earlier critical efforts. M. Maurois' book is so amusing, so readable, and in its delineation of Godwin, of Timothy Shelley, of Mrs. Mitchener, and of Byron and Claire, so deft, discreet and witty, that it has misled many eminent critics, blinding them to the fact that while every one else is in the book, there is, at any rate after 1815, no Shelley. You have only

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to turn from his later chapters to any of Shelley's contemporary letters to see that M Maurois has been so fascinated by the witty and delightful pictures he has been painting of the Shelley *ménage* that he has forgotten Shelley. His book is not a portrait at all, but a genre study in which Shelley appears as he did to his less intelligent friends—the same size as they, or even a little smaller. Mrs Campbell is quite free from this mistake. She knows well that Shelley is a far bigger man than his friends, and she can show that many of his friends began to suspect this, even if they did think his poetry less important than Tommy Moore's, and about on a level with Leigh Hunt's. She knows that her business is to paint Shelley, but unfortunately her chief talent is truculent and rather clumsy satire—so she is much more successful when she is drawing Shelley's friends than when she tries to interpret Shelley. She is too angry about too many things, and against too many people. Sometimes she is stupid and insensitive, as in her reference to the 'false and noxious praise of Francis Thompson, who loved Shelley—as a sickly child loves sweets, guiltily, fretfully, perversely'. Sometimes she is entertaining, if not entirely just, as in her sweeping condemnation of Shelley's friends.

The chief of them are seven in number and telling them over is like calling for a march past of the seven Deadly Sins. There is Trelawny, with his irredeemable vanity and raging temper, the covetous Godwin, the lecherous Byron, the slipshod Hunt, the sly Medwin, the disdainful Peacock, and the gluttonous Hogg.

She is at her best in some of the narrative chapters, as in the excellent, sane, and fair minded account of

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Shelley and the Westbrooks, and in some critical passages which show an attention to and a knowledge of the importance of Shelley's poetry which are often sadly missing in books about the poet. Her book would have been far better had she pruned it, and reduced some of the wilder infelicities of her excessive style—'an age bristling with unhappy marriages' 'In most other respects we feel, when we come to know them, that no two men could be more unlike than Shelley and Peacock—and that it was especially Peacock.'

Mrs Campbell quotes with a scornful disapprobation, which most lovers of Shelley will share, Charles Kingley's extravagant criticism that Shelley was 'incapable of anything like inductive reasoning, unable to take cognizance of any facts but those which please his taste, or to draw any conclusions from them but such as also please his taste. . . A nature utterly womanish.' Civilized men no longer use 'womanish' as a satisfactory term of abuse, and intelligent men are becoming less and less inclined to believe that mental or moral qualities necessarily follow the lines of sex. Yet I am sorry that Mrs Campbell missed the opportunity which that epithet afforded. There is nothing as 'womanish' in Shelley as Byron's vanity, or Godwin's narrow conventionality, or Kingley's own incapacity to control his impulses, but the word should have suggested something about Shelley which both Mrs Campbell and M. Maurois ignore. Is there any evidence that Shelley in his whole life ever initiated a friendship with one of his own sex? Were not all his chosen friends, his intimates, his disciples, women? And is

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it not curious, and not irrelevant, that all men who knew him at all well, from Uncle Pilfold to the Pirate Trelawny, fell immediately victims to a charm which was not 'womanish', but which exercised very much the same kind of power as that of a lovely and exceptionally intelligent woman? One of the strangest things about Shelley is that, after his miserable time at Eton, he was never unpopular, never disliked by those who knew him. Southey could, at a distance, whip himself up into foolish denunciations of Shelley, the blackest of villains, but when he had met him he was reminded of his own youth. Yet Shelley, admired and liked as he was by men—by Hogg, by Byron, by Peacock—always seems to have preferred the society and the conversation of women. He was more at home with them, and the fact is one which has never been properly stressed by writers on Shelley.

It is, of course, a fact which was responsible for the greatest tragedy of his life. I have no intention here of retelling or discussing the disaster of that elopement of two children and its tragic consequences, but it is worth while noticing that Shelley's affection for Harriet was never, before their marriage, of a kind which would, had it not been for the industrious efforts of Eliza Westbrook and those pitiful appeals of Harriet herself, have naturally led to marriage. He wanted a companion in ideas, a disciple, he found himself with a wife, a child wife whose brain he could pack neatly enough, but to whom he could not give his own gift of rapid intellectual development.

It was the fashion of our grandparents to couple

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and compare Shelley and Byron, it is one which we can hardly escape. It strikes us now as almost incredible that of the two men, Shelley was the more execrated, the more feared, the more detested by public opinion. In this their contemporaries followed a fashion which is by no means dead yet. Byron, with his vices, his vulgarities, his boastful devilries, was a rebel who admitted the rules of the society from which he was exiled, and admitted their validity. Shelley was a rebel who denied the rules, and feared nothing but cruelty, intolerance and injustice. He shocked Byron by the freedom of his opinions, while Byron disgusted him by the beastliness of his life. One of the oldest instincts of mankind is to make things hard for the honest heretic. He threatens our peace of mind, while the ordinary and extravagant sinner flatters our sense of moral superiority. Had Shelley been born at another time, or in another country, he might have been a saint. Long before his early death he discarded the crude atheism of his boyhood, yet even in his boyhood there is something which reminds us of the character of Francis of Assisi. His attitude to property was curiously Franciscan, with one important and fatal difference. When Francis noticed that his father did not share his views, and objected to his exercising charity at his expense, Francis promptly embraced poverty. Shelley, while he denounced and genuinely disliked the laws by which his father was unable to disinherit him, did not mind taking advantage of those laws. I admit that any other action would have been a counsel of perfection, for Shelley loved to help others, loved to give money away, and must have felt he

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could do better with his thousand pounds a year than could Sir Timothy Yet he was in this false, to some extent, to his own principles He loved power—power which he had denounced in *Queen Mab*

Power, like a desolating pestilence,  
Pollutes whatever it touches

Power, hatred of which inspired that finest of his long works, *Prometheus Unbound* In this hatred of force Shelley's philosophy, as distinct from his theology, was Christian The only authority of which he admits the validity is a moral authority—'the overruling Spirit of the collective energy of the moral and material world—a Power by which we are surrounded like the atmosphere in which some motionless life is suspended, which visits with its breath our silent chords at will' That definition of God is incomplete, and leans too much to the Deism of his youth, but is there any doubt that the author of *The Masque of Anarchy*, had he lived, would have corrected his philosophy? Of the great poets of his time—Byron, Keats, Wordsworth and Coleridge—we know that three at least before they reached Shelley's age, had ceased intellectually to develop, Keats and Shelley died still learning, still advancing—died before they had attained a tenth of their spiritual stature

## The Opium Eater    ◦    ◦    ◦    ◦    ◦

FOR great visions and true, a clear mind, a disciplined body and a controlled spirit are needed. Nothing strikes the reader of mystical literature more forcibly than the difference between the visions of the single-eyed and the pure-minded and the visions of those who seek to find beauty in ways which are not beautiful or to attain to the sublime by paths that go astray from or below the ordinary roads trodden by humanity. There is a stabbing and immediate sanity about the visions of the great seers, whether they be Jew or Buddhist, Hindu or Mohammedan, heathen or Christian, and if we think that the great Christian mystics are at once more firmly on human ground and closer to the heavens than the others, we must also joyfully admit that in this region of mystic vision we have, if we could only use it, a sign of that profound unity which holds together, in an unbreakable bond, all men of good will who believe that there is no ultimate goal for man except the apprehension and the enjoyment of the eternal and the divine. Nothing so enheartens us ordinary, blundering, mistaken, striving and failing believers as the great fact that the men and women who live strongly and continuously in a realization of the transient nature of this world all find in the world of reality, in the world of the supernatural, the same truth, the same hope, the same transcendent and comforting love. The highest souls

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of our race all testify to the same qualities in that Power which gives meaning and light to the dark confusion of our existence, and our knowledge of that fact sustains us in our conviction that our faith in God is really the gift of His grace, the evidence of His revelation

The vision of the saints of the world is true vision, and it is their vision which gives its meaning to those other visions, sublime in their way, in their way unsurpassed, of the great artists. The artists are, as it were, the sacramentalists of philosophic truth, and while a man is mortal and corporeal, they will always be of wider service than the mystics. Although without the mystics' stringent discipline they could not exist, and their use is by parable and picture, to enable those of us who would otherwise fail to reach the truths of eternal things. The greatest artists have their discipline too, one as hard as the discipline of the moral athlete who too often misunderstands the artist, just as the artist is unjust to him. As a rule a far-minded man who remembers that beauty has no need of defence will have small difficulty in distinguishing between what is and what is not legitimate in art, or when an artist has, by his very contempt or neglect of morals, introduced into his art a moral problem. Yet there are exceptions, and none perhaps present greater difficulties than Thomas De Quincey. Dr. Santsbury, in an introduction to a reprint of *The Opium Eater*, *The English Mail Coach*, and *Suspiria de Profundis*, comments on the magical and sometimes mystagogic prose of these celebrated pieces with the skill, the learning and the shrewd wisdom and stubborn humour of



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which he is a master. About De Quincey as a prose writer there is little to be said after Dr. Saintsbury has finished, but there is one sentence in his essay which suggested the motive of this brief comment of mine. De Quincey drank laudanum, and he has told us what laudanum did for him, and we know from these pages what De Quincey and laudanum have done for us. Was his use of laudanum justified or not? Dr. Saintsbury writes.

It is just possible—shocking as the suggestion may seem to the out and out denouncers of all *Paradis Artificiels*—that he would have had no literary merit at all, or much less of it, if he had not had that tooth ache and face ache, and gone to the mysterious vanishing 'chemist near the Pantheon' in order to mitigate it.

It is not often that I differ flatly from any opinion of Dr. Saintsbury's on literature, and it is a temerarious pleasure to do so now, but I find it hard to understand how he could write that sentence. I am grateful to him for writing it, because in reading it I suddenly realized what it was in *The Opium Eater* which always left me dissatisfied, seeking for something which the author should have given me and did not. The pages of that amazing little book and of its companions are packed with pictures; they are pictures which suggest to me many different things, from Durer's engravings to Poe's pictures in words. Yet they are not mere pictures, as are too many of Poe's; they keep an echo of a music which De Quincey never masters and which one feels he could have mastered. They are the pictures of a man who should have seen and described visions,

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but instead was content to paint pictures, and the cause of this contentment was, I believe, precisely that indulgence in laudanum which at once stimulated his imagination and his fancy, and lulled into a heavy oblivion his power of vision. There has been much talk lately of 'extravert' and 'introvert' artists, that is, of artists who turn chiefly away from themselves to the external world, and artists who, in all that they do, express the visions and the desire of their own soul, the truth is that the greatest artist, while he will not neglect the object will not despise representation will always remember that all representation is subordinate to imaginative vision. I believe that the very greatest extravert artists—say Rubens or Hals—have at some time in their lives killed their power of vision, not by laudanum as De Quincey did, but by some other preoccupation, some drug or custom, or obedience to other rules than those of their art and of their own souls.

In De Quincey we find again and again the ghosts of abandoned visions, of visions half remembered but forsaken for some vivid and entrancing picture. They are so near the direct, clear, unhindered vision of the masters—and so far. If we compare them to something in their own manner—say a paragraph of Donne's or of Thomas Browne's—how painted and how theatrical De Quincey seems, and a line or two of Blake's takes the reality out of them and leaves us cold and dismal, realizing with an acute discomfort that, for all the elaboration, for all the gorgeous setting and the magic of the words, for all the opulent colours of the picture, there is nothing there but

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De Quincey sitting in his room 'seventeen feet by twelve' with the wine-decanter containing a quart of 'ruby-coloured laudanum'.

Of course to say that De Quincey sacrificed his power of seeing visions to the pleasure of making pictures is not to say that his books, and especially the essays gathered here, have not a beauty of their own. In the *Suspiria de Profundis*, especially, there are passages which for eloquence, for careful composition and cunning arrangement no author of his day, except perhaps Landor, could equal. Yet we go down these sentences, in admiration of their symmetry and their power, and expecting that they will lead us at last to some open temple, to an altar on which a flame burns, or to some high place from which one can see a far-off loveliness: again and again we go on in expectation, and always the end is disappointment.

And the disappointment is the greater because in De Quincey, as in Coleridge, the drug has deadened something beside the pain and the mental desolation for the soothing of which it was originally taken. It is evident enough, from his additions to later issues of *The Opium Eater* (not reprinted here) that De Quincey's critical faculty about his own work was not very acute, but that has been true of other artists. What I lament in De Quincey is his fatal satisfaction with a kind of work and a level of work which is, I feel as I read his best things, far lower than what he should have demanded of himself. He sits by the fire dreaming, and his dreams have nothing of that dynamic quality which, had it not been for opium, he could have given them, he opens

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no gates and no windows, but hangs over them the thick, picturesque curtains of his drug-born fantasy, stilling the illusion of the actual world with an illusion even more enervating and unreal.

## John Wesley   ♡   ♡   ♡   ♡   ♡   ♡

**I**T was a strange and untoward providence which decreed that John Wesley was born an Englishman, and never was destined to come under the influence of anyone belonging to the Latin peoples. The whole course of religion in Europe, and far more in America, would have been different had the founder of the Methodist societies had any acquaintance with Latin Catholicism. It is not that any profound modification of Wesley's theology might have been expected; it is that there would have been an insensible but inevitable change in discipline. The monstrous disproportions of the Methodist order, the exaggerated emphasis laid on harmless or actually beneficial pleasures and social amusements—dancing, card playing, attendance at theatres—would have found no place in Methodist society, and Methodism, after its founder's death, would probably have leavened, and not left, the Church of England.

The great accident which tore the connexion between the Church of England and the Church of Rome in the sixteenth century had results in history, in religion, in morals, which far outlasted the period of the Reformation. To some extent those results were felt all over Europe, but in France and Italy, in Germany and the Netherlands, Protestantism had a directness, an absolute decision, which it never acquired in England except among unimportant and sporadic sects. Then with the arrival of Methodism, in origin the least Protestant (if we ignore for

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the moment the Society of Friends) of all the Christian heresies, Protestantism, by an odd perversity, attained a formal foothold in the Christianity of England and the United States which it has never lost, perhaps never will lose. Methodism has one outstanding peculiarity. It was in origin, and is still very largely a religion in the old technical sense of the word—like the Capuchin, the Oratorian or the Dominican, it had no schismatic intention. It was not, that is, like the Brownist heresy, or the Anabaptist, an effort to re-write Christian history, to re-order the course of ecclesiastical degrees. Neither its founder nor its earliest and most powerful adherents had any expectation of altering the Christian faith as it was understood by, and accepted in, the Church of England. They merely wished to deepen the religious life of that body, and to deepen it by the old traditional method of themselves living a life rather more strict, rather nearer to the Domineal counsels of perfection than the life of the average churchman. This profession was perfectly sincere; there was nothing about it of pretence, nothing of an anxiety to excuse actual breaches of tradition by a lip service to obedience and authority. The interview between Charles Wesley and Gibson, Bishop of London in 1728, is well representative of the brothers' position at the time.

‘Who gave you authority to baptize?’—‘Your Lordship,’ replied Charles (for he had been ordained priest by him), ‘and I shall exercise it in any part of the known world’—‘Are you a licensed curate?’ said the Bishop, who began to feel justly offended at the tenor of this conversation, and Charles Wesley, who then perceived that he could no longer appeal to the letter of the law, replied he had the leave of

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the proper minister 'But do you not know that no man can exercise parochial duty in London without my leave? It is only *sub silentio*'—'But you know many do take that permission for authority, and you yourself allow it.'—'It is one thing to connive,' said the bishop, 'and another to approve. I have power to inhibit you'—'Does your lordship exact that power? Do you inhibit me?' The answer was, 'Oh! why will you push matters to an extreme?' and the bishop put an end to this irritating interview by saying, 'Well, sir, you knew my judgment before and you know it now'

This regularity in irregular proceedings, this orderly rebellion, this constitutional disturbance is the great mark of the Methodist movement. it left its indelible record on the future of the religion when separation came. For Charles and John Wesley had trained their followers to regard themselves as loyal sons of the Church, churchmen who were not less but more dutiful than the average churchman, and this was a claim which was by no means baseless. So, when the split came, the Methodists—or a large part of them—continued to insist that they were the true church people, loyal, particular, and only peculiar in that they adhered as well to the rules and customs of their own society. By this time, owing mainly to John Wesley's own action, the whole body was so full of a hidden schismatic spirit that the Methodists turned their heresy into a test of orthodoxy, and became the most Protestant—in matters of discipline and order—of all the sects in England. Where Independents, Baptists, Quakers, Presbyterians were content to fight the Catholic Church, the Methodists, quietly and unnoticed, supplanted it. They presented the new world in particular not with a rival, which noticeably differed from and defied the

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historical congregation of Christendom, but with a body whose identity was claimed to be one with the historical Church of England, to which many Methodists, even in our day, still insist that they belong.

A position of this kind was almost unexampled in the history of Christendom. There had been plenty of heresies and plenty of religious movements in Europe before the eighteenth century; but there had never been a movement or an order which, while it grew more and more obviously divisive in tendency, professed a closer unity with the organization from which it was separating than that of the orthodox members of the organization. There was a blindness, a curious self-complacency in the Methodist attitude which even still has power to infuriate the unimaginative churchman; and there are many Methodists who find it impossible to understand what they regard as the capriciously rigid attitude of those churchmen who insist upon calling them dissenters.

John Wesley was born in 1703, and his life was almost coterminous with that of the century. If one has to accept in this matter the patristic criterion *securus judicat orbis terrarum*, there would be no doubt that John Wesley would be acclaimed the greatest man of that great hundred years. That his name is better known, his presumed influence more widely spread, his memory more revered, his nominal following larger and more fervid than that of any other Englishman, is indisputable. There are others, of course, who have influenced thought far more—Newton in Wesley's time, Darwin in the next century; not even in religion does he rank among the greatest.



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He made only a few and unimportant innovations in the life of the Church, his new things were generally old things, and his strength lay in the acceptance and following of tradition. His greatness lay in his indomitable energy, in which he excelled men such as Loyola and Xavier, his amazing power of discipline over himself and others, his sheer force of character—a force more dynamic than that of any religious leader since Luther, and possibly since St Paul. It was this which made his successes, it was this which was at the root of his faults, and it was through reliance on it that he won time and again when most men would have gone heavily to defeat, and it was through his own misunderstanding of its nature that he blundered. Like most people of strong character, only in a far higher degree, he always mistook self-confidence for certainty, and found it almost impossible to believe that a man so positive, and whose positiveness was so inordinately flattered, could ever be completely in the wrong. This astounding aspect of his own self-will, this heroic obstinacy, comes out best, perhaps, in the story of Kingswood.

Southey, in his unjustly despised life—recently edited excellently by Mr Maurice Fitzgerald—gives a fair account of the school. It was founded for educating the children of his lay preachers and others, it admitted boys as young as six years old, and 'no child should be received unless his parents would agree that they would not take him from school, no, not for a day, till they took him for good and all'.

The children were to rise at four, winter and summer, this Wesley said he knew, by constant observation and by

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long experience, to be of admirable use, either for preserving a good or improving a bad constitution, and he affirmed that it was of peculiar service in almost all nervous complaints, both in preventing and in removing them. They were to spend the time till five in private, partly in reading, partly in singing, partly in prayer, and in self examination and meditation, those that were capable of it. Poor boys' they had better have spent it in sleep. From five till seven they breakfasted and walked, or worked, the master being with them, for the master was constantly to be present, and there were no holidays, and no play, on any day. Wesley had learnt a sour German proverb, saying, 'He that plays when he is a child, will play when he is a man,' and he had forgotten an English one, proceeding from good nature and good sense, which tells us by what kind of discipline Jack may be made a dull boy. 'Why,' he asks, should he learn, now, what he must forget by and by?' Why? For the same reason that he is fed with milk when a suckling because it is the food convenient for him. They were to work in fair weather, according to their strength, in the garden, on rainy days, in the house, always in the presence of a master, for they were never, day or night to be alone. This part of his system Wesley adopted from the great school at Jena, in Saxony. It is the practice of Catholic schools, and may, perhaps upon a comparison of evils, be better than the opposite extreme, which leaves the boys during the greater part of their time, wholly without superintendence. At a great expense of instinct and enjoyment, and of that freedom of character, without which the best character can only obtain from us a cold esteem it gets rid of much vice much cruelty, and much unhappiness. The school hours were from seven to eleven, and from one to five. Eight was the hour for going to bed. They slept in one dormitory, each in a separate bed. A master lay in the same room, and a lamp was kept burning there. Their food was as simple as possible, and two days in the week no meat was allowed.

The school was a complete failure. It started in 1748 with twenty eight boys and six masters. The discipline was abominable. After it had been open

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a year Wesley wondered why he went on with it ; yet in 1753 it was still in existence, and still unsatisfactory, and he writes :

' Surely,' he says, ' the importance of this design is apparent, even from the difficulties that attend it. I spent more money, and time, and care on this than almost any design I ever had, and still it exercises all the patience I have. But it is worth all the labour.'

Thirteen years he was saying of it, ' I will kill or cure. I will have one or the other—a Christian school or none at all ', and a little later he can write, ' Every man of sense who read the rules might conclude that a school so conducted by men of piety and understanding would exceed any other school in Great Britain or Ireland ' So the extraordinary story continues. Those who are interested in one of the wildest educational lunacies ever devised by man must turn to the account in Southey ; especially to the pages describing the dreadful scenes, lasting for five days, when, after a visit to see a corpse, the whole school, masters and maidservants, kept up an orgy of hysterical religious excitement. Among the pupils subjected to this infamous assault on their emotions were children—four or five—' not above seven or eight years old '.

Other men, other great men, have made mistakes and clung tenaciously to errors ; but surely never did so great a man adhere so pertinaciously to such gross errors. Similar errors stain the whole history of Methodism, both among adults and children ; and those who can remember the Welsh revival of Evan Roberts will recollect that this unhealthy strain is

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still found in Methodism. Under the guidance of Whitefield, Methodism made the fatal mistake of regarding religion as a problem of conscious emotional experience. There was more than that, of course ; but no one man is so responsible as is John Wesley, for the disastrous error that assumes an identity between feeling good and being good—an error which has devastated American thought both in metaphysics and ethics. Worse than that, by stressing indifferent matters, such as abstention from playing cards, from recreation, from reading fiction, Wesley gave his followers a false standard of holiness. He enabled men to despise their fellows, and made them very ready to try and enforce the little sumptuary laws of the spiritual world on others. In this way Methodism is ultimately the parent of William James and Mr. Volstead—pragmatism and prohibition are both its children ; and the doctrine of assurance, in Wesley's own mind something rather austere and sublime, degenerates into that doctrine of mere impudence which gives the tea soaked Welsh and the tobacco dried American the necessary effrontery to condemn the drinker of beer and wine as a beast of a lower order of morals, almost on a different scale of existence. What has been wrong with the system which Wesley started is evident. He tried to invent a religious order whose members should, and should not, be out of the world. About a great many of his reforms his disciplinary measures and his innovations no one would complain, if it was not that he confused these works of supererogation with the ordinary demands of the Christian life. Also, in trying to force his followers into the adoption of a selected

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number of the counsels of perfection, he attempted a hopeless task ; If a man's wife and children are to be subordinated to the claim of religious professions it is evident that a man is better unmarried , here the sense of the Catholic Church, had he known more of it, would have saved him That has always asserted that for the married man family life and married affection are means of grace, and are not subordinate to religion, but a part of it , and a married man has no right to plead other business as an excuse for neglecting his wife. Wesley desired an asceticism which is incompatible with life in the world : and he reduced his own argument to an absurdity when he maintained that those who saw no harm in wearing gold, precious stones and costly apparel, might as well say, ' There is no harm in stealing or adultery '

Yet the melancholy thing is that there was need of Wesley's teaching on these things, just as there is need to-day Senseless extravagance, vulgar ostentation, cruel and stupid waste—none of these are pleasant or desirable customs , they need denouncing, but you will only succeed in ruining your case if you confound the bad habits of stupid people with the willed sins of wicked people That was what John Wesley did. He had no tolerance about *adiaphora*, and condemned them with a hot-headedness that even the ancient Puritans and the Jews kept for the Cities of the Plain

Had Wesley only been born an Italian ! There are violent and even ridiculous things in Bonaventura's sermons , but they were addressed to people who, however extravagantly they might be moved at the time, had behind them a sense, a culture, a reasoned

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religion, which never allowed them for long to confuse beauty with sin, or make the mistake of believing that they were called to live out of the world unless they adopted deliberately the specific perils and joys of the monastic life. Wesley had in him somewhere a touch of that fatal Manicheism which has ruined so much of Anglo Saxon Christianity. He could not believe in innocence, he felt a wickedness in mere loveliness, and, like Tolstoy after him, spoiled his message by forgetting that the ordinary man has been restored to a sense of innocence, and will not find wickedness nor vice except when the will has been perverted and has gone whoring after ends definitely, that is, imaginatively and passionately, evil.

## Waistcoats and Wit



THEY make but a poor substitute for wit or for wisdom, do waistcoats ; but they have certainly been wit's accompaniment in the history of literature and society. Nor is this unnatural. Wit is, after all, an elegance, an unnecessary something which has grown up with the growth of an artificial, modish, mannered society, and of all our garments waistcoats, I suppose, are the least useful, and can be the most ornamental. Devotees of the garment have been known, I believe, to wear five ; here there seems to be some mysterious connexion between the waistcoat and that once universal, but now extinct raiment the petticoat, a multitude of which has been known to surround the figures of some of the children of Cockayne. This devotion is, however, a sartorial greediness, the mark of a mere gourmand. the gourmet relies not on quantity but on quality, and he loves his waistcoat as a symbol of peacockery, an ornament for the display of human vanity. No doubt a display may be made in coat and in breeches, but these are essentials, just as humour and sense are essentials in life, while wit, though a pleasant one, is an extravagance, like the waistcoat. And of that extravagance what a master was Benjamin Disraeli ! There is a revival in the minor novelists of the nineteenth century, and few deserve better a new hearing than the author of *Sybil*, of *Contarini Fleming*, and *Lothair*. Viewed in comparison with his life as a statesman and publicist, I suppose Disraeli's novels

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are only the waistcoat many devoted members of Primrose Leagues, many stout-faced Englishmen who still do honour to this strange Jew have never read a line of his fiction. It is their misfortune. More than that, Disraeli the statesman cannot be understood by those who are not familiar with the three novels of 'new England'—*Coningsby*, *Sybil*, and *Tancred*—and with the general preface to the Huggenden edition of his novels, written in 1870. For Disraeli, of all our great public men, was single, of one piece, of an inner consistency and conviction that was as unchangeable as his garments, intellectual, artistic and sartorial, were variable and varied. In a sense he is a simple figure. He transferred to England that passion which his fellow Jews usually kept for Israel, and his love of Empire was a metamorphosis of that ancient Jewish desire for proselytism. It is not, however, with Disraeli the statesman I am now concerned, but with the novelist.

Disraeli ventured into the writing of fiction for financial reasons. He called in the novel to redress the balance of the pamphlet. He had published three pamphlets under the following formidable titles—*An Enquiry into Plans, Progress and Policy of the American Mining Companies, Lawyers and Legislators, or Notes on the American Mining Companies*, and *The Present State of Mexico*—Mexico was then as now a country whose interest in itself was at least not greater than the interest of other countries in Mexico. They were pamphlets, Mr Guedalla writes in his lively introductory note to *Vivian Gray*, in which 'the writer's fancy played a trifle freely over the agreeable prospects of remunerative



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investment' They proved a poor source of income to the young Disraeli, who was in debt to his publishers to the extent of a hundred and fifty pounds. A plan to run a daily newspaper as a rival to *The Times* also failed, and to these disasters we owe *Vivian Gray*, which was published in 1825 and brought its author two hundred pounds. It is a bubbling, indiscriminate, attractive, boyish kind of book, and is not without that interest attaching to all novels in which some of the characters can be held to have historical prototypes. The author, of course, is Vivian, and we can discover fairly clearly, if not the lineaments of Byron, of Lady Caroline Lamb, of Brougham, yet the author's caricatures of these familiar features. It is not, however, for characterization or caricature that anyone would read *Vivian Gray* to-day. It can be enjoyed partly for its author's occasional flashes of brilliance, and partly for the genuine and youthful high spirits which inform it. In some passages and epigrams can be discerned the wit which was to be so much more brilliantly in evidence in Disraeli's later novels, and an impudence which afterwards matured into an art of charming which can rarely have been excelled in politics, for Melbourne, who is here Disraeli's only rival, was naturally a charmer, and also started with at least three quarters of a mile start in every mile to be run by the politician in England. The impudence is genuine and not unconscious: 'Vivian discoursed on a new Venetian liqueur, and taught the Marquess how to mull Moselle, an operation of which the Marquess had never heard' (as who has?) The wit did not spare the people whose favour even

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at twenty-one Disraeli must have known was essential to him ; this can be seen in the excellent sketch of Sir Christopher Mowbray, who for ' half a century has supported in the senate, with equal assiduousness and silence, the constitution and the Corn Laws ' . . . ' The only thing he does not exactly comprehend is the London University. This affair really puzzles the worthy gentleman, who could as easily fancy a country member not being a freeholder as an university not being at Oxford or Cambridge ' Disraeli's high spirits are seen at their most extravagant in the grotesque scene in the palace of the Rhine wines, when the unfortunate and half-starving Vivian is compelled to drink such quantities of mixed drinks as would make Silenus himself sign the pledge.

*The Young Duke* was a very different composition. It is at once more serious and less mature, and it contains more high-salutin' in its rhetorical passages ; for these in *Italian Gray* always faintly suggest parody, while I am afraid Mr. Benjamin Disraeli was perfectly grave when he penned the last words of *The Young Duke* : ' His young sister, who has not yet escaped from her beautiful mother's arms, and who beareth the blooming title of the Lady May.' No wonder old Isaac murmured, ' What does Ben know about Dukes ? ' In some ways, however, *The Young Duke* is to be preferred to Disraeli's first novel. The love story of the Duke and May Dacre has passages of genuine tenderness, and in this book is first exhibited Disraeli's fascinated interest in Catholicism. I wish Mr. Guedalla had said in his preface how much acquaintance Disraeli had had by 1829 with the old Catholic families, for his picture of the comparative

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severity of their lives, the isolation of such families as the Dacres from other English families of their rank seems to be painted from actual knowledge. In the character of Dacre, the guardian of the young Duke, Disraeli has succeeded in portraying a man of exceptional integrity, high principle and sound judgment in a way which never makes the reader regard him as either priggish or sanctimonious. In the sketches of society he has been extremely deft in conveying that quick and superficial intimacy which has no more genuine significance than polite people's expression of pleasure at an entertainment. The Duke himself, though treated with some snobishness, is a rough approximation to the truth, there can be little doubt, from memoirs of the period, that with such self-satisfaction did young men of that position behave, and such extravagance did too many of them exhibit.

There are bits of the book that Disraeli hardly excelled; for instance, the fine and vivid account of the gambling party which is the apogee of the Duke's follies. The gamblers have played straight on end for forty hours and more. The Duke has lost one hundred thousand pounds. Here is the account of the last day's play

Another morning came, and there they sat, ankle deep in cards. No attempt at breakfast now, no affectation of making a toilet or airing the room. The atmosphere was hot, to be sure, but it well became such a Hell. There they sat, in total, in positive forgetfulness of everything but the hot game they were hunting down. There was not a man in the room, except Tom Cogit, who could have told you the name of the town in which they were living. There they

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sat, almost breathless, watching every turn with the fell look in their cannibal eyes which showed their total inability to sympathize with their fellow beings. All forms of society had been long forgotten. There was no snuff box handed about now, for courtesy, admiration, or a pinch, no affectation of occasionally making a remark upon any other topic but the all engrossing one. Lord Castlefort rested with his arms on the table—a false tooth had got unhinged. His Lordship, who, at any other time, would have been most annoyed, coolly put it in his pocket. His cheeks had fallen, and he looked twenty years older. Lord Dice had torn off his cravat, and his hair hung down over his callous, bloodless cheeks, straight as silk. Temple Grace looked as if he were blighted by lightning, and his deep, blue eyes gleamed like a hyaena's. The Baron was least changed. Tom Cogit who smelt that the crisis was at hand, was as quiet as a bribed rat.

Artists have been men of affairs both before and since Disraeli's day; but there is no other instance in which a politician and statesman of such eminence as Disraeli used his knowledge and experience in the writing of fiction. Apart, however, from this personal and historical interest the novels—especially the three 'Young England' ones—are of a far higher value in the world of fiction than has been generally admitted. It is absurd to compare them with the thinly-spread pinchbeck of Lytton, a man whose manner was always too large for him. Disraeli was much bigger than his pose, and had many other garments in his literary wardrobe besides decorated waistcoats.

THERE is a sentence in Mr. Fausset's study of Coleridge which gives both the strength and the weakness of that strange man. 'He went to Ottery St. Mary—discovered that he had neither tastes nor feelings in common with his clerical or military brothers,—a fact which he learnt from their conversation, but tactfully did not suffer them to learn from him.' As poet, as critic, as philosopher, as theologian Coleridge was always too deferential to the opinions and convictions of others. He had his own views. He could express them strongly. He could illustrate them, at times, with a beauty and a perfection unexcelled in our literature. He had his own doubts and his own solutions. But he was always too sensitive, too malleable. The chief merit of this study of Mr. Fausset's is that he shows us a Coleridge who, from the days of his early radical associations with Southey to the days of his return to an orthodoxy which had in it much of convention, was continually influenced by his over-sensitiveness to the feelings of others, of men whom a stronger, less sensitive character would have ignored or despised. This trait in his character meant strength as well as weakness. It is this trait which makes Coleridge the most vibrantly responsive of all literary critics, as sympathetic to Swift—did anyone ever excel that fine figure *Anima Rabelaisii in sicco*?—as to Shakespeare, and as fair to Wordsworth as to Milton.

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His extreme sensibility also made him responsive to the slightest whisper in the new poetic movement, so that in the poetry of Coleridge, while we miss the massiveness and the structural power, we hear a music finer and more evocative than Wordsworth's, more prophetic of the future even than Keats'. It is this, too, in him which has made so many critics find in Coleridge, and rightly find, anticipations of modern ideas. His over-susceptibility was the spiritual analogue of that gift which enables some men to hear notes generally inaudible, and it is not an extravagance to say that in Coleridge can be found the beginnings of many modern philosophies. Mr. Fausset quotes one saying of Coleridge's in which he adumbrates the extremer form of that religious philosophy called Modernism :

I should have been a Christian had Christ never lived, that all that was good in the teaching of Christ was to be found in Plato, in Zoroaster, Confucius and the Gymnosophists, that the miracles had no force as affirming truths, were of no more weight than so many conjuring tricks

I do not mean that any modern religious philosopher, not even Loisy, would express himself quite like that, but that it is possible to see in that sentence the germ of that non rational, non historical attitude to truth which has been so harmful to our generation. So harmful, and yet in a way so unutterably helpful. For it is largely to Coleridge that we owe the rediscovery of the truth that the symbolic content of a truth may be, if it is not always, of more importance than its historical veridicity ; to Coleridge we largely owe it that we can distinguish now between facts

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and truth, between the eternal significance of the truth and the temporary importance of the fact which expresses it. I find Mr. Fausset's essay quite unsatisfactory when he deals with the last period of Coleridge. I do not think it is true that his relapse into orthodoxy was really of a shirking of old problems. It came rather from a firm conviction that man needs something disciplinary in the life of the mind—that not merely correct thinking, but any thinking, is impossible in a region of complete license. You cannot, for instance, think at all unless you have as a basis a theory of causation. Coleridge's gradual appreciation of the value of orthodox religion was surely based very largely on the same convictions which made him, earlier, express himself in a way that earns Mr. Fausset's approval.

On such meagre diet as feelings, evaporated embryos in their progress to birth, no moral being ever became healthy.

Some of its manifestations were rather unfortunate, Coleridge's thought may have hardened as he grew older, one may perhaps discern in it a desire for security which is not altogether noble; but one cannot judge this process or his development without reference to the astonishing fluidity, the extreme sensitiveness of his early years. Mr. Fausset does not seem to me sufficiently to appreciate any of this; and his lack of understanding of this side of Coleridge's character, of this aspect of his needs, is shown by his odd criticism of the conclusion of "The Ancient Mariner", of which he says Coleridge

sharply forecasted the conventional religious sanctuary to which he himself was at last to resort, when a wreck, with

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warped planks and sere sails, he drifted over the harbour bar of Highgate

Of the young Coleridge, the boy and the youth, of that passionate, generous age when he dreamed dreams of brotherhood and truth, Mr. Fausset writes with sympathy and understanding. One plain fact stands out in Coleridge's life. All those who loved him best are the most attractive and lovable of his acquaintances—Lamb, Dorothy Wordsworth, Sarah Hutchinson—which of us would not sooner take their judgment on a fellow-creature than Wordsworth's or Southey's? The breach with Southey was inevitable. Southey was a serious, radical politician, with an itch for the practical. Coleridge was an idealist, a sentimentalist, and his ignorance of men and women was based on an indiscriminate, universal good-will, while Southey's was based on vanity. The later breach with Wordsworth only seems unnecessary because we have got used to the association of these two vehemently dissimilar characters. Wordsworth was never a man of fancy—his imagination sprang from a close contact with the actual world. It is certain that he would have broken with Coleridge long before he did had it not been for his sister's most unusual and lovely sympathy with his friend. Whether, had Coleridge been unmarried, or married to a different woman, Dorothy, by continuous companionship, could have healed and strengthened his spirit we cannot be certain, but it is certain, I think, that Coleridge's marriage to a woman with whom he had so little in common—a woman who could not understand him—was fatal to that self-improvement which was his only chance of recovery. Mrs.



Coleridge was not only uneducated, she was stupid. It was nothing less than a disaster that the author of 'Christabel' should have married a woman whose only expressed reason for opposing a separation was the talk it would cause, and whom Coleridge could yet praise as 'the wife of a man of genius who sympathizes effectively with her husband in his habits and feelings'. That this effective sympathy meant that Sara exercised no control over her husband's recourse to opium is, I am afraid, only too certain. Too much may be made of the effects of the drug on Coleridge, but you cannot make too much of the effect made by continual yielding to the vice, after Coleridge had determined to cut himself free from it. His failure in this soon became to him, in his moments of self-criticism and self-understanding, a symbol of his failures in other things, of his lack of concentration, his deplorable tendency to verbiage and rhetoric. It is this last tendency which makes Coleridge the prose-author so difficult for us to read to-day. There are splendid passages in nearly all the prose books; but they are lost in a wilderness of words, and to look for them is like looking for an oasis in a desert, and struggling through a sand-storm to reach it, struggling too with the fear that the oasis may, after all, be only a mirage. In those great passages of prose, in those sure and shrewd and illuminating passages of criticism, even more than in the poems, does the real Coleridge emerge. In much of his work we hear unuttered the complaint that he once uttered consciously:

Dreadful was the feeling—till then life had flown so that I had always been a boy as it were, and this sensation had

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blended in all my conduct my willing acknowledgement of superiority, and in truth, my meeting every person as a superior at the first moment

It was Coleridge's fate to make friends of men who accepted his homage as naturally as he gave it, and with no more reluctance. How much it meant to them I do not suppose they ever realized. His almost unqualified adoration of Wordsworth and, previously, of Southey was certainly bad for both: it confirmed in them a sense of importance which was good neither for their art nor their characters. The only man of genius who seems to have been able to treat Coleridge as an equal was Charles Lamb, and his judgment nearly represented the truth, I could wish Mr Fausset had given us more of Lamb's Coleridge, and of Dorothy Wordsworth's. There was rarely a man of genius whose vices and faults were so much the excess of his virtues. The truth is, Mr Fausset has little knowledge of and less patience with those philosophical abstractions in which Coleridge delighted to wander. In consequence he stresses them. I think, too much, determined to be free from that easiest of faults in a critical biographer—too great leniency to his subject's weaknesses. It is true, I think, that Coleridge is at his weakest in his writing on religion: that is, on poetical and personal religion: nor could we expect anything else. But he is not weak in his writing on theology, and in his influence on Maurice and Newman he has an importance which Mr Fausset hardly suspects.

## George Herbert      o      o      o      o      o

**G**EORGE HERBERT was born in 1593 and he entered Trinity College, Cambridge, from Westminster in 1608; in his first year of residence at the University he wrote a letter to his mother in which he already, at the age of sixteen, shows the spirit and determination which characterized his life-work. John Donne was a great friend of Lady Magdalen Herbert; and there can be little doubt that the great Dean's influence was largely instrumental in directing the tenor of George Herbert's genius. To men of culture and imagination, to all who were anxious that the Church in England should keep its position as a proper inheritor of the European and Catholic tradition, John Donne was by far the most impressive figure alive at the beginning of the seventeenth century. The rumour of his fierce and vehement youth, the memory of his passionate and personal poems, the surprise of his ordination at the age of forty-two, his astounding powers as a prophetic preacher and religious poet—all these stirred the imagination of a boy who could admire John Donne as a friend of his family as well as worship him as a great poet. It is no exaggeration to say that it is to Donne's startling personality that we owe the poetry of Herbert, of Vaughan, of Traherne, of Crashaw, and of Marvell, and while none of them can fetch so dangerous a course as Donne, nor bring to earth with quite so certain a power the very glow and sunshine of eternity,

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Herbert, in some ways, remains nearest to his master's mind, even if Vaughan comes closer to his heart. And Herbert's intellectual affinities to Donne are shown in this letter of his boyhood, with its accompanying sonnets :

For my own part, my meaning (dear Mother) is, in these<sup>e</sup> Sonnets, to declare my resolution to be that my poor Abilities in Poetry, shall be all and ever consecrated to God's glory and I beg you to receive this as one testimony

My God, where is that antient heat towards thee,  
Wherewith whole showls of Martyrs once did burn,  
Besides their other flames ? Doth Poetry  
Wear Venus Livery ? only serve her turn ?  
Why are not sonnets made of thee ? and Layes  
Upon thine Altar burnt ? Cannot thy love  
Heighten a spirit to sound out thy praise  
As well as any she ? Cannot thy Dove  
Outstrip their Cupid easily in flight ?  
Or, since thy ways are deep, and still the same,  
Will not a verse run smooth that bears thy name ?  
Why doth that fire, which by thy power and might  
Each breast does feel, no braver fewel choose  
Than that, which one day, Worms may chance refuse ?

Sure, Lord, there is enough in thee to dry  
Oceans of Ink, for as the Deluge did  
Cover the earth, so doth thy Majesty  
Each cloud distils thy praise and doth forbid  
Poets to turn it to another use  
Roses and Lilies speak Thee, and to make  
A pair of Cheeks of them, is thy abuse  
Why should I Women's eyes for Chrystal take ?  
Such poor invention burns in their low mind  
Whose fire is wild, and doth not upward go  
To praise, and on thee Lord, some Ink bestow  
Open the bones, and you shall nothing find  
In the best face but filth, when, Lord, in Thee  
The beauty lies in the discovery

## George Herbert

The boy who wrote those sonnets might have been expected to abandon the world almost immediately. In fact, Herbert did not take priest's orders till he was thirty six years, and then only under pressure from Laud. His reluctance sprang from mixed causes. His mother's desire to see him ordained must have been a very powerful influence, but Herbert was extraordinarily diffident about his own powers, and felt a sense of unworthiness in himself which was not overcome by a sense of vocation. It is a temerarious suggestion, but I have often wondered whether George Herbert had any real vocation to the priesthood; and whether his own diffidence did not spring from his knowledge that his real work was to be not a Christian priest but a Christian poet. However that may be, he is certainly, with the exception of Christina Rossetti, the one poet whose work has done most to make something passionate and extreme out of the religion of the middle way, the Anglican. The man who sees something on both sides of a question is always in a hazardous and unenviable position. Partisans of both sides will hate him, as they hated Erasmus; and the fact that he is right may be a comfort to him, but often it will not enable him to present the middle way as the most exciting, as well as the truest, the most exciting because the truest. Now, the Church of England since the sixteenth century has been in this troublesome position of seeing something of both sides of a great many controversial questions; Anglicans have had to hear their Church denounced as a mere Protestant sect and as a cheap imitation of the Scarlet Woman—and too many of us, while repudiating both

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denigrations, have been content to be soberly and quietly mediocre. That there are traces of that attitude in Herbert's poetry I would not deny ; but on the whole *The Temple* is an extraordinarily successful attempt to present the Catholic faith, as one man found it in the religion of the Church of England, as an overwhelming, positive, lovely thing, durable not because of any efforts at compromise, but for its own sake. The history of *The Temple* is curious. Herbert did not publish the book, but on his death-bed directed the manuscript to be sent to his friend Nicholas Ferrar (or Farrer), who printed an edition in 1633, the year of Herbert's death. There were fifteen separate editions published between that year and 1700. It was an enormously popular book, twenty thousand copies had been sold by 1670 ; and since Pickering's edition of Herbert's works (1836), no book of religious verse in English has been so popular except *The Christian Year*. Recently Herbert's reputation has suffered a little. Mr. Edmund Blunden, still a little pardonably dizzy from his days with Henry Vaughan, even relegated Herbert's God to the vestry ; but I am sure he would reconsider that harsh sentence if he re-read such lines as these :

### LOVE

Love bad mee welcome yet my soule drew back  
    Guilty of dust and sin  
But quick ey'd Love observing mee grow slack  
    From my first entrance in,  
Drew neerer to mee, sweetly questioning,  
    If I lack'd any thing

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A guest, I answer'd, worthy to be heere  
Love said, you shalbe he  
I the unkind, ungratefull ? Ah my Deere,  
I cannot looke on thee \*  
Love tooke my hand, and smiling did reply,  
Who made the eyes but I ?

Truth *Lord*, but I have marrd them . let my shame  
Goe, where it doth deserve  
And know you not sayes Love, who bore the blame ?  
My Deere, then I will serve  
You must sitt downe sayes Love, and tast my meat  
So I did sitt and eat.

Yet Herbert would perhaps have welcomed Mr. Blunden's criticism. Nothing is more remarkable in his work—and the same is true of Miss Rossetti's—than the power to show us the divine energy in drudgery, the heavenly light in the commonplace, the eternal beauty in the lowly and unlikely places of the earth. Great are the poets who transport us into the regions of the celestial altitudes, but a special reward and gratitude are due to those who transform and transfigure the ordinary things of this world till they take on the glow and certainty of that other sublime order and reality.

## Abraham Lincoln    ♪    ♪    ♪    ♪    ♪

**I**N Mr. Louis Untermeyer's anthology of modern American poetry there are seven poems on Abraham Lincoln; he calls especial attention to them, as a man who edited a Jewish, an English, or a French anthology might call attention to poems on Abraham or Moses, on Alfred or Cromwell, on St. Louis or St. Joan of Arc. Lincoln, whose death not a few men still living can remember, is already a symbolic figure, the inspiration and the image of that America which he lived and died to establish, and which, to some observers, seems farther from realization than it did when Lincoln, in Springfield, labelled his boxes 'A. Lincoln, The White House, Washington, D.C.'; farther off than on that grim day in October 1859 when John Brown was taken prisoner; farther off than on that other day, 2 December 1859, when John Brown was hanged, and Lincoln uttered his sober and memorable warning:

Old John Brown thought slavery was wrong, as we do; he attacked slavery contrary to law, and it availed him nothing before the law that he thought himself right. He has just been hanged for treason against the state of Virginia; and we cannot object, tho' he agreed with us in calling slavery wrong. Now if you undertake to destroy the Union contrary to law, if you commit treason against the United States, our duty will be to deal with you as John Brown has been dealt with. We shall try to do our duty.

It should help to bring the America which Lincoln lived and died to make, a land of liberty within the



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law, if we could have a true account of the life, the opinions, the hopes, and the character of Lincoln, of the man whom the world agrees in regarding as the symbol of the best in America, the representative not of what America is, but of what America can be. It is hard to get a true picture of Lincoln. He is buried, almost sumptuously, in the ten volumes of the official biography by Hay and Nicolay; the abbreviation of that work is no doubt an accurate synopsis, but it is as unreadable as most synopses. Recently we had from an Englishman, Lord Charnwood, a brilliant and sympathetic sketch, but it was an essay in appreciation rather than a life, and it did not somehow show us Lincoln in his own country and in his own time.

Of Mr. Carl Sandburg's book on Lincoln's life up to his election to the Presidency it is hard for me to speak without an appearance of exaggeration. I began it with some prejudice. Mr. Sandburg's merits as a poet have been very much over-praised; and the mind disclosed in *Smoke and Steel* and *Chicago Poems* seems rather disorderly, over-emphatic, and determinedly prejudiced. I shrank from the size of these volumes. Mr. Sandburg only takes Lincoln's life up to the time when he is leaving Springfield for Washington, and to get it that far he uses over nine hundred pages, with over four hundred words on the page. I have read every word on every page. I would not say that there is not a single word on any page which I would have left unaltered, there are a few passages which I think might be omitted, but it is a great many years since I have read so long a book and desired so little in

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the way of alteration or omission. The book is a masterpiece. It is, which is even more remarkable, a masterpiece which suits its subject. The man in it is everybody's Lincoln, and the style and the manner disclose Lincoln as clearly as, in his lifetime, did his suit, his high hat, and his unfolded umbrella. We have recently, both in England and France, had brilliant biographical sketches which owe most of their fascination to the fact that they are *tours de force*. For instance, more than half the charm of M. Maurois' *Ariel* resides in the fact that it is a queer, new, one-sided view of Shelley. The author of that entertaining and delightful volume has forced Shelley into an unusual position. Lincoln grows out of Mr Sandburg's volumes. He is revealed to us as, we imagine, he must have been revealed to his intimate acquaintances—sometimes we doubt if this tremendous and lonely man ever had any friends, if by 'friend' is meant one who understands and sympathizes as well as loves. Mr Sandburg has been blamed already in America because he has used material—talk of the street, of the barber's shop, of the office, of the local courts, of the stores and the saloons—which had been noticed and rejected by other biographers. It seems to me that Mr Sandburg is obviously right. I do not know that all these stories, these reminiscences, coloured as some are by the knowledge that 'Abe' had become Mr Lincoln, and then the martyred President, are always impeccably accurate, but they have an unmistakable air of truth about them. They may not, all of them, be actual incidents in Lincoln's life, but they are part of Lincoln's character.

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Mr Sandburg's method is one of leisurely recollection. He tells his great story almost as an inspired child might—very carefully, very clearly, in an order only occasionally disturbed by reflections on what Lincoln might have known and thought in the world of his pilgrimage. He brings to us fact after fact, rumour after rumour, year by year he follows Abraham Lincoln with a reverence that will not be content with anything less than truth, an affection which can only be satisfied if he tells us all he knows about Lincoln, and a sympathy that enables him to keep that calm, uncontroversial manner which is more valuable than the most skilful dialectic. He knows that he is writing about one of the most lovable figures, as well as one of the wisest, in this world's history, and he knows that if he does not say this, but paints his portrait carefully and unpretentiously, we shall all see Lincoln as he sees him, and as, in his own day, the men of great genius and the men and women of great simplicity were given the power to see him.

All great men whose strength lies in contact with their fellows are more sensitive to their times and the manners of their times than are the small ordinary folk. These are more subdued to the colour of their surroundings, but they are subdued unwittingly. The hagiographer who, sooner or later, gets hold of all great men, contrives his job of smoothing, dehumanizing, symbolizing largely by forgetting the hero's quickness to respond to environment. Mr. Sandburg has seen that you cannot have a real Lincoln until you know what, in his day, Kentucky

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and Illinois were like, he has not only seen that necessity—he has had the patience to acquire the information, and he has had the skill to give his readers a most impressive, an unforgettable account of the society in which Lincoln was brought up. It was wild. It was extraordinarily uncultured. It was queerly religious, pathetically agnostic, and savagely brutal. It kept its respect for two qualities—courage and honour, and something in Lincoln, apart from his physical strength, his amazing courage and his unstained honour, made the rudest of his associates see that it didn't matter that Lincoln never drank, never gambled, never shot and never 'went with women'. In spite of these oddities, Lincoln was always 'one of us'. He was so sensitive to his environment that he never yielded to it, so understanding of his companions that he never, so far as the record goes, had to modify an opinion or to suppress a conviction however alien from their ideas. He was an artist in life, with the deep, occasionally morbid humiliation of the artist, but he never bungled or wasted his material.

In nothing is Mr Sandburg more successful than in showing Lincoln never alone, yet always lonely, amazingly akin to, incredibly different from, his people. While one reads the long record of his *travail among ideas*, one is struck more and more with the man's huge eminence. In a world where other men thought of freeing slaves, or keeping slaves, of saving the Union, or asserting the rights of States, Lincoln is continually preoccupied with freedom and truth, and yet never forgets that it is his peculiar task to make a society ready for neither

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willing to follow him. He was entirely free from the faults, while he had nearly all the virtues, of the pedant and the recluse - just as, devoid utterly of priggishness, he had a nice sense of duty and of decency which went far beyond the ideals of the most sanctimonious. He never allowed reason, or his prejudices, or even his own logical principles, to hamper him in regions where reason and principles ought to yield. Mr. Sandburg tells one story of his days as a surveyor which is a beautiful illustration of Lincoln's unerring sense of values :

Surveying the town of Petersburg, he laid out one street crooked. If he had run it straight and regular, the house of a Jemima Elmore and her family would have been in the street. She was the widow of an old friend who had been a private in Lincoln's company during the Black Hawk war and was farming on a little tract of land with her children.

He did not even allow his sense of legal etiquette to distract him from the right. He was once forced—he was not by himself as a lawyer—to take the case of a man who was trying to recapture some slaves. Lincoln lost the case, and never had his fee, as Mr. Sandburg writes.

As Lincoln straddled his grey mare and rode into the October prairie haze, he might have recalled the remark he once made to a lawyer who had asked him to go in on a case he did not believe in and he had said: "You'll have to get some other fellow to win this case for you. I wouldn't do it. All the while I'd be talking to that jury I'd be thinking 'Lincoln, you're a liar', and I believe I should forget myself and say it out loud."

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He got into trouble with his companions of the Bar by charging too small fees, once he returned half of a fee of two hundred and fifty dollars.

Judge Davis said, in the wheezing whisper of a man weighing 300 pounds, 'Lincoln, you are impoverishing this bar by your picayune charges of fees, and the lawyers have reason to complain of you' Other lawyers murmured approval. Lincoln stuck to the point 'That money comes out of the pocket of a poor, demented girl, and I would rather starve than swindle her in this manner' In the evening at the hotel, the lawyers held a mock court and fined him, he paid the fine, rehearsed a new line of funny stories, and stuck to his original point that he wouldn't belong to a law firm that could be styled 'Catch 'em and Cheat 'em'

It is not surprising that clever men, brilliant men, men of great talent could see nothing in Lincoln. The men of genius, Emerson, Whitman, recognized in him something God inspired, and so did the simplest of his acquaintances and relatives, but the clever men, the men represented most supremely by Stephen Douglas (though Douglas himself was aware of some odd greatness in his opponent), could make nothing of the enthusiasm for Lincoln. Their views would be expressed in the words of a Springfield lawyer who,

after ten years of courtroom acquaintance with Lincoln tried to analyse Lincoln's mind, noting 'Physiologically and phrenologically, the man was a sort of monstrosity. His frame was long, spare bony, and muscular, his head small and disproportionately shaped. It is inconsistent with the laws of human organization for any such creature to possess a mind capable of anything called great. It was a case of where "passion or sentiment steadied and determined an

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otherwise indecisive mind" He would say Lincoln "had no mind not possessed by the most ordinary of men"

To define Lincoln's greatness is as difficult as to define the greatness of Socrates, of Oliver Cromwell, of Francis of Assisi; but it is worth noticing that instinctively we compare him not to ordinary statesmen, but to men of philosophy and religion. The most conspicuous thing in his character, made very lucid by Mr Sandburg, is his sense of what has recently been called 'the numinous', that element in religion which passes beyond the category of ethics. Lincoln's deep melancholy, his profound disturbance and distress after Ann Rutledge's death, his consequent fear of suicide, his awareness that he was driven and compelled by something which most men did not feel—all of these are characteristics of the man who cannot be satisfied by the world of sense or the world of reason. He conquered, in so far as he did conquer, because he had two tremendous advantages over his opponents—had he been beaten, he would have felt no personal distress, and he knew that, whether he won or lost, he was right, and that behind him were powers which he could not always explain, could not always talk about, even to himself, but which he could never do other than obey. Again he resembled the great men of religion by his refusal, by his inability rather, to recommend himself or his gospel to those who could not understand, men who thought his comic stories, his loose, farmer's manners, his easy familiarity incompatible with the role of a 'Great Man' must be allowed so to think. He could not change his wisdom, or his folly, to suit the

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pompous follies of the world's fools. Even some men who admired him were so rotten with a false politeness that they were shocked into apologies for Lincoln's stories, yet, if we can trust Mr Sandburg's specimens, he never told a story that was not funny, and rarely told a funny story that had not some hint in it of wisdom. After his election to the Presidency, when he was besieged by office hunters, bores, cranks, and parasites of all kinds, he would use his stories as a kind of barrage to scare off fools.

To day Lincoln is the national American hero, far outstripping George Washington, and the strange, sad thing is that, since Lincoln's death, his country has apparently moved steadily away from all that he held dear. What would the man who made a street crooked to save a widow's house think of America to-day? What would Lincoln, rough, ill dressed, eccentric to the verge of wildness, vehemently individual and peculiar, make of his United States in which industry, religion, politics, morals, manners, clothes, language, ways of travel, art, are reduced to one shining level of standardization—to an America which may worship 'old Abe' but which is content to follow the example and principles of the conventional Mrs. Lincoln? If he came back would he say now, what he said when he was warned by a friend that he was going to his death in Washington, 'Hannah, if they do kill me, I shall never die another death'? I wonder. Yet it must not be forgotten that Lincoln is the national hero, that he stands, not only in the United States, for the real greatness and the soul of the country whose unity he saved. There is too much known of him, we are too



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close to his day for the effects of hagiology to succeed ; and this biography of Mr. Sandburg's should be a powerful aid in giving the real Lincoln back to us. It is the literary counterpart of the Barnard statue , and if it is read and loved as it should be, Americans may yet turn from their present worship of standard and success and spare parts, and once more lead the world in the struggle for reasoned freedom and that devotion to truth which will not be satisfied until there is a genuine agreement between principle and practice.

## Uncut Stones



WE demand from small things a perfection which we do not ask from great. Indeed, in the very greatest efforts of man's art, an undue finish, a careful regard to detail, a conscious completeness of effect we find rather chilling. No one but a pedant really disapproves of the huge casualness of Shakespeare, or the heedless profusion of Dickens. Most of us would admit that Flaubert was a greater artist than Balzac, but would cling to a feeling that Balzac was a greater author. It is so dreadfully easy, in all the arts, for the craftsman to overcome the creator, and for a man to sacrifice to method so religiously that he forgets his aspiration. Some of us are heretics about the perfection even of Sophocles, and hold him with less affection, less reverence than we give to Euripides or Aeschylus. No doubt Homer is perfect, but his art has a simplicity that departed from the world centuries ago, and though we may dispute that the bard nods, we would admit that his readers may, there is no roughness in the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey*, but there are becalming passages, repetitive lines in which the poet's inspiration is content with but little speed. There would seem to be a natural reason for this neglect of minute finish, or finical refinement, in big things. No one wants the forests of the Old or the New World to exhibit the ordered politeness of a Dutch or Italian garden, it would terrify rather than delight us if we discovered an elephant or a hippopotamus with the exquisite

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delicacy of detail that marks a butterfly. There is something cheering and heartening in the slap-dash, good-humoured clumsiness of shape in certain animals. Were they too particular and nice they would have not the perfection of the tiny things, but the cold and uncomfortable precision of the machine. Miniatures should be dainty, but who would change the awkward fascination of the lurching sow, or lose anything from the grave and swaying bulk of the bullock, as he moves slowly across the ploughed fields of Italy?

If, however, we welcome a certain unwieldiness in large things we resent it in small. It distresses us as if it were a deformity. It does not seem right that finish should not go with minuteness. This distress is the source of most of our uneasiness at some kinds of modern verse, and explains the welcome which many gave to the poems of Rupert Brooke. Too many modern poets were engaged in producing verse, tiny in import and in actual size, the merest trifles of things, which yet exhibited all the awkwardness of thought-burdened epics. I have read verses about the less attractive weeds of the country-side in which the poet has felt at liberty to indulge in a kind of heavy, morose unmannerliness, a congestion of speech and thought far greater than our supreme poet, Mr Thomas Hardy, ever found necessary in his sublime effort to see the drama of Napoleon acted in the great 'O' of eternity. Rupert Brooke sometimes wrote trivial verse, sometimes poems not very sincere, but all his work was shapely, dainty, winged, brilliant. His poems have the lively daintiness of little living things—and we excuse to their perfection

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an occasional insolence. It is stupid to despise the small poem. After all, the sonnet is brief and highly artificial, and some of the greatest poems in the world are sonnets. In the epigram a few English poets have done imperishable things, four lines can carry magnificence more surely than forty books, and Landor's poems will be read and loved long after all but the devout students have ceased struggling with his major work, whether *Gebir* or the *Imaginary Conversations*. But what can we say about the unpolished epigram, the unfinished, clumsy poem—tiny and yet with all the faults of huge size? Usually one can dismiss such as rubbish. Their carelessness is their condemnation, a poet who fails in four or five lines to keep his own skill quick and alive can hardly hope to keep your attention. Yet one poet must be excepted from this—Emily Dickinson.

Emily Dickinson was an American, a girl who was almost a hermit. She published nothing in her lifetime, but she wrote a great deal, and there is now a complete edition of her poems. I wish, however, that a more satisfactory edition were available than that edited by Mrs. Dickinson Branch, who, in an enthusiastic introduction, evades useful information for five pages, with a skill almost unexampled. She tells us that Emily died in 1886, that four volumes of her work have been published since then. She gives the name of one. She gives no hint of the governing principle in her edition, or of its arrangement and scope. Nor is there any explanation of the new readings introduced into some poems—readings which are presumably closer to Emily Dickinson's manuscript, as they leave the poems in

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a rougher, less finished form than that hitherto current

Here we have, however, the poems—and a critical estimate of them is extremely difficult. I first met Emily Dickinson's work about thirty years ago, and was immediately struck by its force, its oddly inappropriate roughness, its occasional banality, its frequent immaturity, its startling flashes of illumination, its great debt to Heine. Since her death no one has produced work at all like hers except Mary Coleridge, who not seldom gives me the impression of having succeeded where Emily Dickinson failed. But Mary Coleridge had a more critical, less impressionable temperament than Emily Dickinson. This sensitive, impulsive American girl—looking at her portrait, I wonder if she had any foreign blood—was like a reed blown by the wind. She has fancies rather than ideas, her talent is for images, often contradictory, rather than for that imaginative philosophy which upheld Mary Coleridge. At her best she has a splendid spontaneity which gives her work the swift and radiant power of a lightning flash. At her worst she condescends to a doggerel which disdains rhyme, and only reaches reason by the well-worn road of commonplace. In fairness to her it must be remembered that she did not publish anything, and it is a doubtful kindness thus to print every least scrap of her writing. The lovely and wonderful things in this book have to be hunted out, but when they are found they shine with the same light that haloed them when I first read them.

Because I would not stop for Death,  
He kindly stopped for me,

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The carriage held but just ourselves  
And Immortality

We slowly drove, he knew not haste,  
And I had put away  
My labours and my leisure too,  
For his civility

We passed the school where children played  
At wrestling in a ring  
We passed the fields of grazing grain,  
We passed the setting sun,

We paused before a house that seemed  
A swelling of the ground,  
The roof was scarcely visible  
The cornice but a mound

Since then six centuries, but each  
Is longer than the day  
I first surmised the horses' heads  
Were towards eternity

In spite of the weakness in the third verse—there is another version which has 'children played, their lessons well nigh done'—that is almost a perfect thing. Then there is

Hope is a thing with feathers  
That perches in the soul,  
And sings of sweetest things,  
And builds her nest among the old,

As if that soul had never  
Laid her egg alone of yore,  
And the great heart is sore  
Lest her young be hatched and gone

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I've heard it in the chilliest land  
And on the strangest sea,  
Yet, never, in extremity,  
It asked a crumb of me.

Her love poems do not satisfy. They are moving, but in some vague way they recall Christina Rossetti, and the superb echoes of Christina's intolerably lovely music make it impossible to listen to poor Emily Dickinson fumbling at her broken spinet. She is not so much a poet in them as a poem—a theme rather than a master.

It was the mysteries of space and eternity which inspired her noblest work, and one forgives her inadequacy when she writes of the high themes and the vast solemnities, because one is so continuously aware that the most perfect speech cannot span the dire necessity of these ultimate questions. She is preoccupied often with the trappings and panoply of death, the mere arrangements of funeral pomp, and 'the man of the appalling trade'. But she can speak straight and clear on the essentials, as in this lovely poem

I never saw a moor,  
I never saw the sea,  
Yet know I how the heather looks,  
And what a wave must be

I never spoke with God,  
Nor visited in heaven,  
Yet certain am I of the spot  
As if the chart were given

## National Art    ♪    ♪    ♪    ♪    ♪    ♪

HAS the United States ever spoken? Speech, natural speech, that is, can only really be uttered in poetry or great prose. For all nations art is the ultimate and unconquerable conserve; and the nations with great artists, who speak a language understood not too hardly by other peoples, take, long after their political disappearance, a great position in the minds of men, in the shaping of the fate of humanity. Empires, commonly regarded as world-wide, proud, and consciously imperial, have disappeared from the memory of the common man, are without influence, except a secondary one, on our conventions and ideals, because they lacked the supreme preservative of great art. Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Sumeria, Carthage, Macedonia, what are they but sounds in the songs of the people whom they conquered, notes in the resigned or vengeful music of the defeated peoples? It is an old enough adage—*Vixere fortes ante Agamemnona*, and it is as true as when Horace wrote it. The countries which endure, cherished and inspiring, are the countries of the great artists. Ancient Judea still persuades the world to the splendour of Isaian prophecy, the simple and deep dialectic of Job, the complaint of Ecclesiastes, and the lovely sweep of the lyre of the Psalmists and the Canticles. Athens is no less an inalienable part of our civilization through her poets, her dramatists, and the incomparable prose of Plato. Rome survives, not through the roads and the ruins,



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the pride and the insolence of the Caesars, but through the passion of Catullus, the lyric sense of Horace, the pity of Virgil, and the march and the epigrams of Tacitus and Livy. To those of us with a sense of history Jingoism seems the oddest and the most lamentable of creeds, for never yet has any empire been remembered for its size; and it would hardly be too much to say that all the real work of the world, all that makes for culture as against comfort, for the things of value as against the things of price, for the kingdom of the eternal as against the kingdom of the transitory, has been accomplished by the small peoples, or by those in large empires who have never made a fetish of national aggrandizement.

In such voices the great modern nations are fortunate. Nor Spain, nor France, nor England, nor Italy, nor Russia has lacked poets, imaginative writers, many of them are regarded, and rightly regarded, as speaking peculiarly for the genius of the country to which they belong. It is needless to catalogue all of these—Cervantes for Spain, Montaigne for France, Shakespeare for England, Dante for Italy, Tolstoy for Russia will occur to anyone. Nor—while no man of critical sensibility will deny that the United States has produced a few great authors, and many authors of high merit, there is still a doubt whether that great country has produced a national prophet. Indeed, it is more than a doubt. While one might hesitate whether Shakespeare or Chaucer was more definitely English, whether Tolstoy or Dostoevsky the better represented Russia, no one would dispute that in all of these authors there is a

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distinct and undefeasible quality of national genius. Of no American author can that be so confidently said. If Poe represents America, what does Hawthorne represent? If Whitman be the prophet of the States, what is Emerson, or Melville, or Mark Twain? Not yet has come the artist who can speak for the whole of America, as Lincoln spoke in the world of affairs. It is then not unreasonable that American authors should be included in that well-known series, English Men of Letters, for even the greatest of American authors belong to the tradition of English literature. There is as yet no separate American tradition.

In the old series only one American—Nathaniel Hawthorne—found a place, of the eleven volumes at present arranged by Mr J. C. Squire for the new series, no less than three are on American authors—Poe, Melville, and Whitman. Two are now published, and Mr. Buley's study of Whitman is not only the best volume yet published in the new series it is worthy to rank beside the masterpieces of the old. Mr Buley is an ideal author for Whitman. He is a traditionalist not only, I should say, by conviction but by preference, and so his admiration for Whitman is based not on a shallow, anarchical dislike of the difficult and the decent, but on a genuine sense of the beauty discovered by Whitman. Many poets have discovered beauty, but in the nineteenth century Whitman surely stands alone in his discovery of beauty where no one before had found her. You may say, if you like, that often he did not deserve to find her, so insolent, so ignorant is he about her ancient and sacred haunts, but find

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her he did, through a certain rare simplicity of nature Mr Bailey not only can see where Whitman excels, he can tell us why he excels in writing poetry freed from the ordinary rules which hitherto had governed most verse. He is not, of course, the first of free-verse poets. Putting aside the rhythmical portions of the Old Testament, there was Ossian, and there was Blake; the unkind would say there was Tupper. Whitman, however, in his triumphant pieces attains to a beauty which no free verse but that of the Old Testament can even pretend to equal. Mr. Bailey has a chapter of invaluable discussion, at once discreet and imaginative, on the value of Whitman's experiments.

He has no need to say anything which he does not exactly mean, no need to find rhymes or ornaments or to force points. From all these things Whitman is delivered by his perfect freedom. And, though no one could repeat his poem (*Salut au Monde*) by heart . . . though it has so little form that it is hard to say whether it can ultimately rank as poetry or art at all, yet there is a simplicity and a sincerity, yea, and a vision too, which is strangely moving when we have grown accustomed to its nakedness. That poetry can strip itself of form quite so naturally as Whitman does here I do not believe. *Salut au Monde* and its fellows will probably remain daring experiments which failed, and are forgotten except by the curious. But they were, it seems to me, experiments worth making, and have shown the way to a freedom which can give birth to art. Perhaps only by this violence and extravagance could the old formal monotones have been successfully challenged. The soldier dies who makes the first breach in the wall. But the fort is carried.

. Whitman himself could follow with such lyrics as those we have been quoting. And they will not die.

Herman Melville, one of the most neglected (until recently) and most important of American authors,

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is in the full English tradition of letters. He wished otherwise, no doubt, and there may be critics who would make other claims for him. I can not see, however, that in his work he introduced any new ideas into literature, as Whitman certainly did. He is one of the greatest of those prose writers whom we associate more naturally with the poets, myself, I cannot help comparing his genius, in spite of grave differences, with the genius of Shelley. He is, as was Shelley, a man of ardent faith, and a man whose mistakes arise from generosity and too little attention to individuals. Mr Freeman is a painstaking, careful critic, but he is not very sensitive to the peculiar quality of Melville's art. No one who was could so dismiss *Pierre* as he does—to say of that amazing book that the author in it 'sank into perversity' is to misconceive the relation of the author to the book, and I find it hard to forgive Mr Freeman for this cruel passage.

The psychology is intolerably followed with the sly and thirsty fury of a stoat, nothing outside the Russians could be more subtle or less scrupulous. 'I write precisely as I please' he cries breaking in on the narrative and in this scorn of others he has written a book which may move deeply but cannot please one.

So might a critic write of *Hamlet*—so apparently does Mr Freeman think of Dostoevsky's *The Possessed*. He may be able to defend his prejudices, but I think that it is unfortunate that a critic with these preconceptions should be writing of Melville. Mr Freeman is excellent in the biographical chapter of his book, and he finds some new and good things

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to say of *Moby Dick*, that great but rather overpraised book. While I admire Melville at his best, I cannot think that his imaginative prose is equal to the best of its kind. His rhythmical sentences have not the perfect assonance, the unhurried and tremendous sweep of the great masters of poetical prose. He too often falters, as in the passage about whiteness in *Moby Dick*. He is not sufficiently careful in the avoidance of dissonant words. Where Melville is unsurpassed is in his power to show us man, haunted by powers which he can neither comprehend nor withstand, pursued and pursuing, always uncertain whether there is in his soul a power to control and conquer the fate which persistently wills to entrap and betray him. Melville conveys more resolutely and yet more despairingly than any author I know that sense of desolation which overcomes, at times, the most faithful, and would surely, did they know themselves, be the permanent mood of many in this generation.

## Jonathan Swift in his Poems and Minor Writings      ~      ~      ~      ~      ~      ~

JONATHAN SWIFT should have been born in the ages of futh. His imaginative daring, his spirit of nonsense, his capacity for grave fooling, his occasional soaring flights, his over-awareness of dirt, his moods, passing, as the years passed, into a settled conviction of accidie—all are more typical of, and would have been more easily encouraged or conquered in the Middle Ages. He had a sense of fun in an age when life was full of wit, he applied to fundamentals an intelligence keen as a rapier, when men like Pope, Gay, Addison, Steele, and even Johnson were applying a careful and destructive method to the details of literature, of politics, of morals. If we wish to gauge the supremacy of Swift we have only to examine the power, the irony, the vehemence of such an essay as *The Tale of a Tub* or that on Irish Children and compare them with the strength which Pope in the *Dunciad*, Addison in his analysis of *Paradise Lost*, Johnson in his *Lives of the Poets* expended on what were, comparatively, matters of no moment. Swift's time was a time of politeness, of elaborate courtesies in life and in literature, of ordered manners, of precise conversation, and he, with a style second to none, with a wit equal to any, with an intelligence only second to the greatest in English letters, forced upon the politenesses and courtesies of society his sombre, desperate reminders of the muck-heap on which their

## Jonathan Swift in His Poems

flowers grew. He was right. He was proved right not by the course of letters only—though the romantic movement would have been vastly different had it not been for Swift—but by the preaching of John Wesley and George Whitfield, by the indignation of Fielding, the loving-kindness of Elizabeth Fry, and the pedantic, efficient, Christian philanthropy of John Howard. Swift has often been blamed for the smell which arises from his pages; but in allowing them to be souled he is more truly representative of his times. The student has only to consult his Joe Miller, or discover an accurate description of the condition of St. James's Park to know that Swift did not exaggerate the part played by ordure in the apparently ordered life of the beaux and the belles. London may not have been a stews, but it stank; and Swift refused to shut his nostrils. It is indisputable, however, that Swift was abnormally sensitive to aspects of life which most men are content to laugh at, or ignore, whether the cause for this was physical or not it is useless to inquire. I am sure that his habit of dragging the midden into the drawing-room, pelting the boudoirs with dung, and defiling even the holy places with filth was hugely aggravated by the fact that he lived in a time when hypocrisy was singularly prominent. There was shamelessness, of course, especially in sexual matters; but the false refinement of the more popular forms of indelicacy, the gross politeness of the popular indecencies, disgusted and enraged a man who was conscious that he had no smuggering interest in the things unspoken or forbidden, the interest which preoccupied the minds of Sterne and his admirers.

## Jonathan Swift in His Poems

The fault of the age is well expressed in Edmund Burke's monstrous and mysteriously applauded proverb: 'Vice itself lost half its evil by losing its grossness,' and we who inherited the bad heritage of that symbol of unreality and cowardice know that the precise opposite is true. It was certainly—that false standard—the ruin of one side of Swift's life.

There are many men and women whose stomachs are not upset by the stupendous muck-heaps that Rabelais left, like so many booby-traps, in the pleasant walks of his famous estate. You stumble into them, pick yourself up, laugh or grimace in accordance with your temperament, and walk on, free of the mess. I have not met anyone who can stand up against the savage, morose horror of Swift at his worst. There is no danger in it, but there are poems of his and a few passages in his prose which make one weep for their sullen and furious morbidity. Had he only lived in an earlier, less hypocritical age he might easily have sweated this out of him, and his genius gone merrily, with a laugh and a dance, instead of tramping, persistently, ominously—as John Gabriel Borkman walked in his room—in the huge, strangely lighted attic where he lived and suffered above the drawing-rooms, brilliantly lit, where Pope and Gay, Sterne and Addison and Steele kept up with so modish a grace the witty conversation of pretence.

Born in the wrong age, Swift had the ill-luck to choose the wrong profession. He was a much better priest than hundreds of fat-living, idle, comfortable parsons; but he was only a good priest because his



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acute sense of duty and public welfare drove him to do his best at a job which he can never have liked, and for which he was obviously unfitted. He was disappointed in never obtaining preferment in England, but if he had, I do not think he would have been happier. He was a man of vehement activity, and he would scarcely have found in the Deanery of St. Paul's—he might, it is true, have been Donne in John Donne's day, just as John Donne, in the reign of Queen Anne, might have been Swift—the opportunities for combat, for hard work, for fighting against intolerance and injustice that he found so easily when he was in charge of St. Patrick's at Dublin. The reasons—or rather the hidden, impulsive motive—which made Swift take holy orders will always remain obscure. Careless critics have found nothing unusual in it, comparing it with Sterne's adoption of the same unsuitable profession. But Sterne was an idler compared with Swift, a man with little tenacity of purpose, not much ambition, and singularly little conscience. Swift was a man of deep convictions—it is a great mistake to read *The Tale of a Tub* or *The Mechanical Operations of the Spirit* as mere *jeux d'esprit*. The only parson to whom Swift can be compared is, as I have suggested, John Donne. and Donne only became ordained after great mental and moral struggle, after much persuasion, and—if we can judge from his writings—under the influence of some experience too overwhelming to be resisted. There is nothing of this in Swift's history. His ordination, strongly opposed by his patron, Sir William Temple, when he was twenty-seven years old, seems the merest whim: its

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only immediate result, when Swift went as Vicar to Kilroot by Belfast Lough, was to give him the painful enjoyment of studying the Presbyterians with that minute loathing and careful animosity which he could so well bestow on persons and principles he despised. The most fantastic of historians, however, can hardly suggest that Swift took holy orders so that he could study the Irish Presbyterians. When, two years after his ordination, he returned to Moor Park, his arrival welcomed by Temple as heartily as his departure was resented, surely Swift must have often asked himself what had induced him to take a step which could not help his life in the least.

It is, however, only after his ordination that Swift began to write, and *The Mechanical Operations of the Spirit* belongs to his earliest period. It was published in his first book with *The Battle of the Books* and *The Tale of a Tub*. Most of the *Thoughts on Various Subjects* belongs to the year 1706, two years after the issue of the first volume, the 'Bickerstaff Papers' are two years later—and the parody on Boyle, though not published till 1710—belongs to the year 1704. I think one may conclude that whatever else his ordination did or did not do for Swift, it led him to develop his initiative, to take risks which he had hitherto avoided. It must not be forgotten that when he first came to Moor Park he was sensitive, shy, self-conscious, and probably accused by the English of being uncouth. Far more than most people, he was always aware, as are so many literary geniuses, of the moods and variations in other people, this awareness bred in him too

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delicate a susceptibility, and he tormented himself by imagining fancied grievances. He once wrote .

Do you remember how I used to be in pain when Sir W. Temple would look cold or out of humour for three or four days, and I used to suspect a hundred reasons? I have plucked up my spirit since then.

No doubt he was right in believing that he had cured himself of attaching too much importance to such changes in his friends or acquaintances; but he never lost his power to quicken to others' difficulties, and the only great tragedy of his life, outside his own personal character, was caused by his reluctance to deal harshly with a temperament not unlike his own, but less unwilling to express its sensibilities. I will discuss the story of Esther Vanhomrigh later on, but it is evident to anyone who reads the poems and the correspondence with sympathetic understanding that Swift's errors sprang from a too sensitive kindness, a delicacy, a readiness to understand the torments and doubts of that unhappy woman, not from any neglect or any cruelty or stupidity.

Of the three early papers the most important and the most typical is *The Mechanical Operations*. It shows, with *The Tale of a Tub*, that Swift's work in Ireland as a parson had forced him to consider religious subjects. It would be unfair to call Swift a sceptic or a deist, he was Christian in ethic and partly in metaphysic; but he had no sympathy with, or understanding of, the mystic and the sacramental aspects of faith. The truth is that just as Swift was incapable, if we may believe his own

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testimony, of the passion of love, so he was incapable of experiencing that religious fervour in which another passion expresses itself. Religion for him was a form of good works, leavened by a respectful and eminently reasonable method of approaching the Infinite. He distrusted enthusiasm, and he was right to distrust it to this extent—that its professors very frequently displayed a lowness of moral standard quite incompatible with their professions. No doubt it would have been wiser to investigate the reason for the curious phenomena noticed in this tract, but that is asking Swift to anticipate the whole recent study of religious psychology, a task for which neither was he fitted nor his day ready. It is amusing to notice how, in not a few passages of the tract, he *does* anticipate the less reasonable school of investigation into religious phenomena, there are sentences which might be inserted into essays by Freud or I euba or Starbuck.

Swift's prose has always been praised for its clearness, its economy, its high ability as a weapon of controversy, not so much attention has been drawn to the beauties of which he is capable, though he rarely allowed himself to use them. I will quote one paragraph in which, apart altogether from its consummate suitability to the subject, Swift attains a rare harmony

Now the Art of *Oratory* consists in skilfully adapting the voice to whatever words the spirit delivers, that each may strike the ears of the audience with its most significant cadence. The force or energy of this eloquence, is not to be found as among ancient orators, in the disposition of words to a sentence, or the turning of long periods but,

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agreeable to the modern refinements in music, is taken up wholly in dwelling and dilating upon the syllables and letters. Thus, it is frequent for a single vowel to draw sighs from a multitude, and for a whole assembly of saints to sob to the music of one solitary liquid. But these are trifles, when even sounds inarticulate are observed to produce as forcible effects. A master workman shall blow his nose so powerfully as to pierce the hearts of his people, who are disposed to receive the excrements of his brain with the same reverence as the issue of it. Hawking, spitting, and belching, the defects of other men's rhetoric, are the flowers, and figures, and ornaments of his. For, the spirit being the same in all, it is of no import through what vehicle it is conveyed.

I do not wish to be over-particular in exposition; but it was a master of prose who arranged the 'r's' and the 'p's' in 'as among ancient orators, in the disposition of words to a sentence, or the turning of long periods', or the 'l's' in 'wholly in dwelling and dilating upon syllables and letters', while in the next sentence, with its exquisite close, 'music in one solitary liquid', Swift has been as much carried away by the beauty of what he is ridiculing as was Pope when he wrote 'Die of a rose in aromatic pain'.

The 'Essay on a Broomstick' and the *Bickerstaff Papers* illustrate Swift's genius for nonsense. His nonsense has the same gusto as that which distinguished the nonsense of the little masters, Lewis Carrol, Lear, and Foote. It tumbles. It bethwacks. It butterslides. And all its more catastrophic, its more insolent and unpardonable escapades in the attack on the unfortunate charlatan Partridge are made all the funnier even for us, and much more for his contemporaries, by the knowledge that at the

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other end of the jester's staff was the handsome, quizzical, saturnine face of the great Jonathan Swift, the man of whom it was written, 'There is something in your looks so awful that it strikes me dumb.' I find it difficult to gauge the interest the *Bickerstaff Papers* will have for the modern reader. They amuse me perhaps disproportionately. They are certainly an excellent example of the gallant art of coddling. It is curious that Swift's power to bamboozle should have lasted so long after his death. I have often heard it mentioned, 'Of course Swift's talent was amazing—he could write about anything, even a broomstick,' as if the point of that parody was to show how a great author could write on any subject. Swift, of course, never chose a trivial subject, at any rate in prose; and the whole point of the *Broomstick* parody was to expose the particular kind of solemn meanderings which we find in so much writing of his day, especially in Robert Boyle's *Meditations*. Not only is the purpose of Swift's skit often forgotten, but, while Boyle has his imitators to day from Sir Arthur Helps to Mr. Frank Crane, Swift's parody has begotten a whole school of essayists, and in its manner much of the best of our modern work has been written. Mr. Belloc, in particular, is a master of the art of making something out of nothing, and Boyle, instead of being laughed at for a moment in Lady Berkeley's withdrawing-room, is ridiculed for all time.

It is a different Swift—a Swift abandoning all nonsense, using only a stern anger and a devastating irony—that we meet in the 'Children of the Poor'. It was *the* Irish tract. That it could have been

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written, that it could have been read—and that, after that, Ireland should have been refused liberty is one of the greatest blots on the escutcheon of England. 'Government without consent of the governed is the very definition of slavery,' as Swift wrote in the *Drapier's Letters*; and such government was to be the fate of that country whose cause he espoused, acknowledging his citizenship, moved by no particular affection, by no atom of sentiment, but by the mere call of justice and fair-dealing.

It is here that Swift may be compared—and only here—to a great contemporary Englishman, Johnson. Although the eighteenth century was an age of reason, though it disliked enthusiasms, professed a coolness of common sense and an affected disregard of emotion, yet its great men were peculiarly susceptible to sentimentality and shallow emotion. Sterne did not invent a new disease: he was describing a symptom. In this mixture of sentimentality and hardness—a mixture which allowed Addison to be a politician—neither Swift nor Johnson shared. Each in his way was a realist. Johnson abused the Whigs and Whiggism, and denounced radicalism; but let him meet Wilkes and he is fair to him. Swift professed High Tory principles; but he found them compatible with, or even dependent on, very democratic ideas. He was genuinely horrified at the careless and casual insolence of the comfortable people in England. He wrote bitter and contemptuous things of the Irish, but never forgot that they were badly governed, starving, and abominably ill served by the men sent over from England to the higher positions in Church and State. The condition

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which provoked the essay on Poor Children was one that was to recur again in Irish history, there was no Swift in 1847, and scarcely a State in America has not some Irishman who remembers the great famine against the rulers of England

'Hospital for Incurables' in the title of that essay we have the expressed and bitter essence of Swift's philosophy. Incurable is the most hopeless word in the language Hopeless—pessimist, cynic, faithless or loveless—all of these epithets of misery carry one cheerful implication The loveless may find love, and the atheist may suddenly see God, the cynic has his own path, if he will stumble on till he reach it, to an idealism not less certain because it has been reached through brambles and mud, and the man who merely despairs of the world may despair of himself and so find something memorable and worthy of praise and preservation But incurable! It abandons hope in the only ultimate way, for it assumes a life, an order in which man is not an actor, but a patient—a creature dependent on outside treatment, whose case has been adjudged hopeless by the diagnosticians of the universe Grimly, painstakingly, with a terrible and unescapable common sense, Swift consigns to this class most of the human race It is regarded as one of the main puzzles of Swift's character that he who thought so poorly, so contemptuously of man, was so fond of men and women, and drew to himself the affection of so many The contrast should not really surprise us The optimist by conviction the man who expects to find men and women good, pleasurable, helpful, is always encountering drastic disappointments A



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philosophy, just as a religion, is generally, in the final result, judged by the exceptions, and many a man has found himself terribly at a loss when he has entered his Utopia, been made free of the city of his desire. He only discovers that his fellow-citizens are, at the best, intolerable bores, at the worst, malignant, stupid, unimaginative, deceitful, and insensible. Swift starts with the tremendous advantage of having the worst possible opinion of mankind, he classes them naturally and sincerely below the level of the animals, regards them as animals gifted with a greater capacity for intentional mischief than the monkey. So when in his pilgrimage he meets this man or that—Gay, or Steele, or Pope, or Temple, or Stella, or Vanessa—and finds them, however occasionally difficult or tedious, to be pleasant, friendly, entertaining, or positively helpful, he is far more pleased than would be the ordinary philanthropic student of life. Yet Swift, like so many philosophers, does not revise his theory of life when he encounters facts that are awkward and inconvenient, he attempts no reconciliation, rejoicing rather in the contradiction as an additional proof of the absurdity of life. So he goes on to the end with his essay on 'Incurables'; and the only modification of it is one in which he does no homage to the human race, but merely allows the incurable patient to escape by the undisguised conclusion that our sufferings and our sins are alike trivial. Boldly, with a superb confidence only pardonable in a man of genius and of his temper, he puts his own thought into the mind of the Eternal.

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With a whirl of thought oppress'd,  
I sunk from reverie to rest  
A horrid vision seized my head,  
I saw the graves give up their dead !  
Jove, arm'd with terrors, burst the skies,  
And thunder roars and lightning flies !  
Amazed, confused, its fate unknown,  
The world stands trembling at his throne !  
While each pale sinner hung his head,  
Jove, nodding shook the heavens, and said ,  
' Offending race of human kind,  
By nature, reason, learning, blind ,  
You who, through frailty, stepp'd aside  
And you who never fell—from pride ,  
You who in different sects were sham'd,  
And come to see each other damn'd  
—So some folk told you, but they know  
No more of Jove's deigns than you  
The world's mad business now is o'er,  
And I resent these pranks no more  
—I to such blockheads set my wit !  
I damn such fools !—Go, go, you're bit

All his life long Jonathan Swift desired intimacy. No man of genius was more capable of it ; no man, perhaps, ever gave to his friends, both men and women, so much in the way of companionship, friendship, kindness, and an ease of intercourse which attained lightness as well as depth and yet never really passed into intimacy. The less sensitive and imaginative of his friends may, no doubt, have often thought that they were intimate with him ; but that error, we may be sure, was never shared by those who came closest to his heart, nearest to feeling the amazing heat and strength of that wild, unconquered, unconquerable spirit. Swift was not a man's man, in spite of his close friendship with men, and

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the masculine turn of much of his genius. He was, it is true, a man whom men admired, to whom men turned for help and confidence, but he was a man whose more spiritual and emotional needs could only be satisfied by friendship with women. Intimacy with women meant for Swift not a relaxation from the battling with his peers, as it meant for Johnson; nor, as again it did for Johnson, did it mean enjoyment of the delightful and necessary domesticities of life. It meant something higher and deeper than friendship with men. It meant adventure. It meant beauty. It meant excitement. It meant a voyaging into the unknown to find what he could not find elsewhere. And a demon within the soul of Jonathan Swift prevented his ever being successful or happy on that voyage. He discovered, whenever he set out on it, that while he longed for intimacy, he could not bear the necessary and harmless adjuncts of intimacy. He wished women to be at once near and remote, familiar yet withdrawn, in this world to supply his needs, in the other to satisfy his squeamishness. He wanted an idol which he could handle, and yet was angry that it was not untouchable. He wanted beauty embodied, but could not reconcile himself to the fact that whatever is embodied has bodily functions. That is part of the truth about Swift's poetry, a part which has to be, in honesty, represented in any selection. If the poems which represent it offend modern taste, that cannot be helped. It is good for us to know that so great a man had so small a weakness, for you neither understand nor pay decent tribute to greatness if you leave out of account those things in which the

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great fail Why Jonathan Swift found bodily functions, and the intimacy which forces them on people's attention, so disgusting is a question we cannot determine It is true that in many of his poems he writes disgustingly of habits and persons which are disgusting, but that must not blind us to the fact that what disgusted Swift was not the degeneracy of dirty people's habits, but the normal habits of all human beings All excretion was to him a horror I think it may not be fanciful to suggest that in some way this man, so proud, so arrogant, so miscast in life, believed that it should be possible for a decent and great man to live without the exercise of those functions whose use he has in common with other animals He had, as is shown in his general suppressed calm and in his occasional furious rages, a huge admiration for self control Did he believe that, by the exercise of a haughty will, men should be able to dispense with the habits of digestion and excretion? That food should be absorbed and disposed of as we throw off the air without which our lives would stop? That love, in especial, should be a thing only of the mind and the spirit, divorced altogether from the manifestations of the flesh? That is a dream which not a few young men and young women have entertained, but they pass from it either into commonplace acquiescence in or ecstatic transfiguration of the body and its demands Your romantic idealizes the body, your spiritual man accepts rejoices, and makes of it a sacrament The wrong thing about Swift is the way in which this matter remains a torment to him long after, one would have thought, he would have passed

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into angry despair or dull resignation. He does not delight in filth, as Rabelais, nor has he the curiosity, intellectual, sombre, enragedly humorous, into sexual life which marks Mr. James Joyce's work. Swift's attitude is one of plain, simple, immediate reaction. He sees life as a city, in many ways desirable and civilized, with many opportunities for enjoyment and recreation, but surrounded by a sewage farm. He never gets used to, he never ignores, the sewage farm. He loathes it and all that it connotes, he especially loathes its proximity to the pleasant intimacies of life. Yet he can never resist rushing to the thing he detests. He illustrates again and again the parable of Socrates, who, when he found himself near the body of a decaying animal, wishing to ignore it and yet with a low desire to gaze and stare, forced himself to glut his morbid desire until he realized its decadent character, but Swift goes out of his way to meet the stench, and has in it not even the meanest and most disgusting exultation, but an immediate detestation which he expresses again and again in the same violent and tortured way. He is, in this, one of the healthiest authors for a normal, imaginative reader. I remember quite well my own sensations when I first read the poems. I passed from a rather ashamed curiosity to sheer disgust, from sheer disgust to a rather shallow amusement, and from shallow amusement into loud laughter and pity. Quite suddenly I realized that this, which the great man said, was simply not so. The excessive lack of proportion, the extreme injustice of Swift's attitude to women for having—for that is all it comes to—the same bodily constitution as men suddenly

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awoke in me a healthy reaction. In this matter Swift exhibits all the signs of an enormous neurasthenia. To the neurasthenic anything which comes regularly and in routine is liable to become intolerable. Not all of life, fortunately, will so change its character. Different sufferers will become victims of different fears. With one it may be catching the train, with another confronting an uncongenial family at meal-time, with another going to bed, with another opening a drawer to find a collar or a handkerchief. With another the arrival of the postman or the need to answer the summons of a telephone. With Swift it was, at least, always this one thing. The boudoir, the closet, the double bed—his fancy only has to stray to any of them—and it strayed far too often—and he writhes helpless, indignant, outraged in pangs which make him for ever of the company of those artists who pace, like the damned souls whom *Vathek* saw, on the fiery and reverberating pavements of hell, each with his hand over his heart, and each with a heart of burning flame.

Swift, little of the poet as he seemed to have in him, had this—it is in his verse that his soul, its desires and disgust, most fully express themselves. He can be foul and dirty mouthed in prose, in prose he can expose the rottenness of humankind and his own savage disappointment at the folly and the deep frivolity of men; but it is in his verse that these sentiments find their most extravagant and outrageous expression. It is in his verse especially that his profound dissatisfaction with women is most vehemently displayed. My statement that it is with women Swift really desired intimacy, that, indeed,

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he believed that only in association with them was real intimacy possible, may seem fantastic. No author has attacked women so mercilessly, scarified their light follies, their vices, their grosser faults, and at times their very nature with a more passionate and unforgiving invective. Yet, even if we did not possess the *Journal to Stella*, as evidence that in his friendship with a woman Swift reaches a tenderness, a sense of intimate human reality which he never shows elsewhere, I think we should still know from the poems that in women his expectation of intimacy alone resided. His morbid and excited curiosity into the unseemliest details of woman's life, his perpetual crying out upon them for their stupid, insolent, greedy, vicious inclinations, all display not the saturnine pleasure which a pessimist might take in finding his worst prognostications realized, but the angry and jealous fury of a man who has been robbed of his hope. Continually frustrated, continually disallowed, he vents on those from whom he had desired so much the vials of his terrible scorn; if he ever suspected, as he must, that the disappointment might in part be due to some flaw in him, his pride forbade him to admit it, except in some general interpretation of human nature. In the poems to Stella we find a more positive statement. Whatever were Swift's exact relations with Mrs. Johnson, there can be no question that in his love for her he found the most peaceful happiness of his life, just as in his love for Esther Vanhomrigh he found the most imaginative excitement. It was not vanity which made Swift so friendly to that ill-fated girl, and so ready to accept her idolatry. He had no need, at

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any time, for external assurance about his genius or the supreme power of his personality, and when he met Vanessa he was well known, courted, and on terms of close friendship with many men of genius. Whether, had he not been bound to Stella, Swift would have permitted Vanessa to love him and to marry him will never be known, but I cannot help believing that he wished it was possible. Although his affection for Stella could never have been classified by him as coming under the guidance of Discretion, I believe that the lines found, in his writing, among Esther Vanhomrigh's papers, were sent to her as a declaration of his desires

What does most my indignation move,  
*Discretion* ! thou wert ne'er a friend to Love  
Thy chief delight is to defeat those arts,  
By which he kindles mutual flames in hearts  
While the blind loitering God is at his play,  
Thou steal'st his golden pointed darts away  
Those darts which never fail, and in their stead  
Convey'st indignant arrows tipped with lead  
The heedless God, suspecting no deceits,  
Shoots on, and thinks he has done wondrous feats,  
But the poor nymph, who feels her vitals burn,  
And from her shepherd can find no return,  
Laments, and rages at the power divine,  
When, cursed *Discretion* ! all the fault was thine  
Cupid and Hymen thou hast set at odds,  
And bred such feuds between those kindred gods,  
That Venus cannot reconcile her sons,  
When one appears, away the other runs  
The former scales, wherein he used to poise  
Love against love, and equal joys with joys,  
Are now fill'd up with avarice and pride,  
Where titles, power, and riches still subside



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Thou, gentle Venus, to thy father run,  
And tell him how thy children are undone,  
Prepare his bolts to give one fatal blow,  
And strike Discretion to the shades below

In a letter of Swift's to Vanessa, after she had followed him to Ireland, he rebukes her "I ever told you you wanted discretion" No doubt he did, but I find that, when he was with her, Swift knew how unnatural was worldly discretion to him. Swift was always tempted to be himself with Vanessa, and her retort to his admonition of caution has more of Swift's real character than is shown in most of his own letters

Now when my misfortunes are increased by being in a disagreeable place, among strange prying decentful people, whose company is so far from an amusement, that it is a very great punishment, you fly me, and give me no reason, but that we are amongst fools, and must submit. I am very well satisfied we are amongst such, but know no reason for my happiness being sacrificed to their caprice. You once had a maxim, which was, to act what was right, and not mind what the world said. I wish you would keep to it now. Pray what can be wrong in seeing and advising an unhappy young woman? I cannot imagine. You cannot but know that your frowns make my life unsupportable. You have taught me to distinguish, and then you leave me miserable.

Stella was to Swift comfort, ease, the nearest approach to hearth and home that he ever contrived to achieve, Vanessa was a temptation, a thrill, some one who roused in him, at one time almost uncontrollably, impulses and desires which he had stifled and subdued. Gossip of Swift's day never agreed on the question we shall now never settle,

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whether he was physically incapable of marriage ; all we can say with certainty is that we know from his writings that he was a man frustrated—whether the frustration was from choice or from necessity it is not possible to decide, though only by actual knowledge of the truth can we really understand much of Swift's writing. For an imposed self discipline, whencever it spring, is very different in its effects on the character from a discipline imposed by a natural disability. Myself, I think all the evidence from Swift's writings is in favour of the discipline being self-imposed, but its nature was probably suggested to Swift by certain morbidities, certain excesses of sensibility in his own character.

While Swift's poetry, even *Cadenus and Vanessa*, even the birthday poems to Stella, never achieve intimacy, it too often produces an effect of undue familiarity. Other poets have written poems which have been inspired in their bedrooms, Swift's more nauseating effects are inspired by the atmosphere (thoroughly hated and abominably rendered) of strange bedrooms into which he has forced himself. Again, other poets have written frankly and freely about their loves, Swift writes like a man who has, in sour anger, broken in on the love making of other people. There is only one great poem of his which is also an intimate poem, and that is the poem about himself. The lines on the 'Death of Dean Swift' are as remarkable for their omissions as their inclusions. The portrait of Swift as a public man, if it is a little flattering, has in it no boast which such a judge as Dr Johnson, for instance, does not uphold in his life of Swift. Swift says practically nothing

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about himself as a priest—for here he would certainly have known how far short he fell of the ideal, though his practice was, for the time, extremely punctilious, and in the performance of his duties he contrived, when he could, to keep his devotions secret. Of the gap his death will make, of the degree of sorrow most men feel at a friend's demise, he has no illusions :

My female friends, whose tender hearts  
Have better learn'd to act their parts,  
Receive the news in doleful dumps.  
'The Dean is dead (Pray what is trumps?)  
Then Lord have mercy on his soul!  
(Ladies, I'll venture on the vole)  
Six deans, they say, must bear the pall—  
(I wish I knew what king to call.)  
Madam, your husband will attend  
The funeral of so great a friend.  
'No, madam, 'tis a shocking sight.  
And he's engaged to-morrow night  
My Lady Club will take it ill,  
If he should fail her at quadrille.  
He loved the Dean—(I lead a heart,)  
But dearest friends, they say, must part.  
His time was come—he ran his race.  
We hope he's in a better place.'  
Why do we grieve that friends should die?  
No loss more easy to supply  
One year is past, a different scene!  
No further mention of the Dean,  
Who now alas! is no more miss'd,  
Than if he never did exist.

Swift's desire for intimacy, checked and thwarted by the demon in him which forbade him from being able to sustain what he desired, was bound to find an outlet. It found that not only in the friendliness

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of his life, in the familiarity, innocent, playful, noxious, malicious, nonsensical, of many of his poems, but also in the series of scathing satires on those social amenities, those accidental substitutes for intimacy by which the great world endeavours to have a good time. There are no poems of the eighteenth century, not even Pope's 'Rape of the Lock', which betray so keenly the follies and fashions of his period. Johnson was evidently a little puzzled what to say about the tremendous Gulliver's 'poetical works', yet, as always, he exhibits his admirable good sense in what he does write :

They are often humorous, almost always light, and have the qualities which recommend such compositions, easiness and gaiety. They are, for the most part what their author intended. The diction is correct, the numbers are smooth, and the rhymes exact. There seldom occurs a hard laboured expression, or a redundant epithet, all his verses exemplify his own definition of a good style, they consist of *proper words in proper places*.

To divide this Collection into classes, and shew how some pieces are gross, and some are trifling, would be to tell the reader what he knows already, and to find faults of which the author could not be ignorant, who certainly wrote not often to his judgement, but his humour.

Johnson either felt himself unequal to the times unfit to discuss the light which the poems throw on Swift's character or, more likely, he felt it was not the business of criticism to discuss 'humorous' work, the appreciation of which must depend not on principles of critical taste so much as on your apprehension of the author's humour. We value Swift's lighter pieces for their wit, their clear-eyed anger,

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their deadly accuracy, and their devastating honesty  
There were many things which Swift did not see,  
but all he saw he could describe And how much  
the same scenes that Swift saw can be seen to-day  
in London, or Paris, or New York'

'This morning, when the parson came,  
I said I should not win a game.  
This odious chair, how came I stuck in't?  
I think I never had good luck in't  
I'm so uneasy in my stays  
Your fan, a moment, if you please  
Stand farther, girl, or get you gone,  
I always lose when you look on.'  
'Lord! madam, you have lost cedille;  
I never saw you play so ill.'  
'Nay, madam, give me leave to say,  
'Twas you that threw the game away  
When Lady Tricksey play'd a four,  
You took it with a matador,  
I saw you touch your wedding ring  
Before my lady call'd a king,  
You spoke a word began with H,  
And I know whom you meant to teach,  
Because you held the king of hearts,  
Fie, madam, leave these little arts.'  
'That's not so bad as one that rubs  
Her chair to call the king of clubs,  
And makes her partner understand  
A matadore is in her hand.'  
'Madam, you have no cause to flounce,  
I swear I saw you thrice renounce'  
'And truly, madam, I know when  
Instead of five you scored me ten,  
Spadillo here has got a mark,  
A child may know it in the dark  
I guess'd the hand it seldom fails  
I wish some folks would pare their nails'

## Jonathan Swift in His Poems

The game of cards is different now, the language is a little less blunt, perhaps, and the manners a little less free, but otherwise how like this dialogue is to many 'inquests' held after a game of auction or contract bridge! And the conclusion is much the same.

Unlucky madam, left in tears,  
(Who now again quadrille forswears,)  
With empty purse, and aching head,  
Steals to her sleeping spouse to bed

When Dryden told the young Swift that he would never be a poet he was right and wrong. His judgment was true that Swift had no power—how few had—to inspire with fire and life the heavy and creaking machinery of the Pindaric ode, if he meant even that Swift would never handle the great couplet, or be able to turn disgust into almost solemn dignity, he was also right. But he was wrong if he thought that Swift had nothing to give to English poetry. Swift could not write poetry, on the old accepted models on which he tried his youthful hand, but he could make new poetry. There are some poems which are as dreadful and as easy as though one of the major prophets had written *vers de société*, and there are nonsense poems in which Swift had made a new thing. There are not only the extravagances, in which Swift indulges his skill for quick rhyming, his little gallops of conversational satire, there is that glorious piece 'Mrs Harris' Petition'. Here, employed in literature (though not literature as his day understood it) is the spirit which invented the little language in the *Journal to*

## Jonathan Swift in His Poems

*Stella*, the spirit which was in a revolt, continuous and stubborn, if never fully understood by Swift, against the spirit and character of his times. Swift, proud and lonely as he always was, was never so lonely as in this, that he had a great ease in himself, but a greater embarrassment if that ease was forced on him by circumstances, by people and by something dark and difficult in his own nature. As we read the poems, nonsense, satire, tendernesses, cynicism, and filth, we may pass from amusement to entertainment, to liking, to affection, to distaste, to disgust, but in the end we are overcome by a great pity. Other men of letters have been born out of due time, but there is no other man in the history of literature who achieved such magnificent things and yet must always have felt in himself the need, the will, and the power to have done better things. There is about his work and about his life a quality which was rare, and seems very strange in England of the eighteenth century, at least among men who moved in the world of politics and society as Swift did. A modern critic might hesitate to give that quality a name, but it was not in idleness, we may be sure, that Dr Johnson wrote of 'a strain of heroism' in Swift. It is not the common view of him, but it is the opinion of one who did not like the Dean, and cared little for much of his work, and no one can really understand Swift who is not prepared to see what it was that Johnson meant.

## Limericks



AN author who started to write on the Limerick habit one night found his pen would but go in this pattern : so, strive hard for plain prose though he might As he read Mr. Reed's observations on the Limerick's peregrinations, rhymes new, and rhymes old, rhymes modest, rhymes bold, insisted, like well known relations, on securing his immediate attention—some retired long ago on a pension, some lay and some clerical, some quite hysterical, and some that I really can't mention. (Though here I declare I refuse to agree with those great ones who choose that the best of the sort are such as report says belong to the Fescennine Muse )

The making of Limericks is one of the few genuine communal crafts left to us , I do not know whether anyone has ever claimed copyright in a Limerick, or established his claim There are no doubt a great many Limericks which owe all their cunning and wit to one author ; but as a rule when one has made a Limerick it is immediately checked, improved, polished, and altered by one's friends I was amused to notice that in Mr. Langford Reed's enlarged edition of his *Complete Limerick Book*, he not only included some specimens which I had quoted in an article which I wrote on the first edition of his book, but he also placed among the ' old favourites ' one which, in writing that same article, I had—so far as I know—invented at the time.



## Limericks

A Voltairian infidel fell  
Down his Louis Quatorze y stair well,  
He continued to fall  
Past the first floor and hall  
Till he finally landed just outside the entrance to the 'cave'  
where they kept the coal for the furnace

Now did I not make that up? Was what I  
believed to be invention merely a trick of unconscious  
memory? It is perhaps more prudent to claim  
authorship, and so I will declare that so far as I can  
be positive of anything, I am the only author of  
these examples, their merit I must leave to the  
tasters of the Limericks.

Amelia Jones was hysterical  
And believed she had grown wholly spherical—  
When asked to roll round  
She replied—'On the ground?  
Why my figure is purely numerical!'

In the controversies which still, I believe, go on  
between the ancient universities of Oxford and  
Cambridge, and in the ardent discussion of the  
precise quality of the contribution made to the  
culture of the Isis by the pilgrims from Pilgrims'  
Pride, these three efforts may prove useful.

Said an Oxford philosopher 'Quite,  
I am frequently sure in the night,  
But at mid-day I say,  
In a tentative way,  
If it is what it would, then it might.'

But a Cambridge man stoutly averred,  
'You've forgotten the strength of the sard,  
Pure figures would show  
That a thing which can't go  
Just equals the cube of a third.'



## Limericks

the nonsense let loose in the couplet. No one has handled that form with such success as he did. Lear was a real master of words—indeed, with Rimbaud, Laforgue, and Lewis Carrol he might be called the father of much modern poetry. What rich significance there is in ‘runcible’ or in the whole epic of the Pobble, with its gravely superb inconsequence. After Lear the Limerick was used by some well-known men—Rossetti, Swinburne, Morris—as a useful medium for vituperative criticism. Swinburne actually incorporated one—printing it in prose—in one of his essays, gibing at Arthur Hugh Clough.

There have been books of Limericks published since Lear’s. One that was popular at Oxford contained many variants of the geographical Limerick applied to the different colleges. There is an engaging simplicity about the one devoted to Balliol.

There once was a scholar of Balliol  
Who was asked what he knew of Gamaliel,  
He replied—‘It’s a hill’—  
The examiners still  
Remember that scholar of Balliol.

An enchanting little book was that by Mr. Cosmo Monkhouse, which had also the great attraction of illustration by Mr. Chesterton. It is shocking to learn that certain well-meaning clergymen are now using the form for the inculcation of scriptural and ecclesiastical knowledge, even if a good serious Limerick could be written, there is little to be gained by taking a form consecrated to folly and turning it to the service of the Sunday school. The only hopeful development in the form is, I think, that

## Limericks

which abandons the traditional beginning. The formula, 'There was a' is too rigid, and must be abandoned; but the efforts to write nonsense narrative poems in a series of Limericks has not at present produced any results worth preserving.

‘ Here We Are Again ! ’      o      o      o

A FRIEND who always insists that, in spite of its occasional vulgarities, its glitter of visitors, its shameless, meretricious provocation, Paris is a more civilized city than London, always caps his argument with two final and clinching propositions. Paris has a Punch and Judy show in the Champs Elysees, and Paris has two circuses. It is difficult to answer him. Nobody could call Paris an unsophisticated city, but it is full of unsophisticated people—and I do not mean by this merely the visiting and resident Americans—and its sophistication has a certain childishness, a quality that always makes a sophistication which contrives as a rule to be gay. In London we are sophisticated and bored; in Rome they are sophisticated and of a deep worldly wisdom; in Madrid they are too proud even to be sophisticated. Outside of Europe sophistication is only a pretence, as is shown by the eager emigration to Europe of those from other countries who hanker after this empty distinction. No Londoner, or Parisian, or Roman ever went to New York to feel superior to being ‘ in the swim ’, and the essence of social sophistication is to despise the life one leads, while at the same time refusing to imagine that any other life is conceivable. In Paris, and to a less degree in France, generally, people are gay in their sophistication, yes, and a little simple—especially the men. So in Paris you can always go to the circus, either in the St. Honoré or farther out.

## ‘ Here We Are Again ! ’

And it is in the circus—now that the old harlequinade is dead—that we may find the traditional clown. Of his remote and immediate past Mr Willson Disher has written an admirable account in his history of *Clowns and Pantomimes*, one of the best books about this kingdom of the theatre that I have ever met. There have been other good ones—Garnier’s, for example—but never has there been such a volume as this which contains astonishing knowledge, great fullness of treatment, breadth of sympathy, and a quite unusual power of writing. Take, for instance, this excellent account of the persistence of the traditional clown, throughout the ages and throughout different countries :

Clowns maintain their distinctive characteristics despite, not because of tradition. All Greek and Roman comedies, the medieval religious plays, the *Commedia dell’ arte* and the English Harlequinade certainly possess definite types in common. Yet these are the very types that are manifestly not borrowed but spontaneously created afresh. The clowns that can be traced from country to country, from century to century, retain only their names and lose their characteristics. Thus *Arlecchino*, the butt, changed to *Arlequin*, the knave, then to *Arlequin* the parodist in every shape imaginable, to *Arlequin*, the swain of *Marivaux*, to *Harlequin* the magician, adventurer and dancer, and finally to a symbolic character. *Pierrot*, before he became mystic and pale as the moon, was a butt or a knave, Clown, who also began as a butt, changed to knave, then to bully, and then to a symbol of pathos. *Auguste* of the *cirque*, another butt is imbued by *Groek* with the romance of a thwarted musician. *Charlie Chaplin* begins as a half wit, grows into an artful dodger and threatens to develop the theme of a clown’s unrequited love in a serious cinema tragedy. Every clown that has basked long enough in the world’s love has grown too small for his boots, taken wings and flown into fancy. And at each

## ‘ Here We Are Again ! ’

metamorphosis the world has to hatch another from a clod.

The more he changes the more the clown is the same. Take away all the vestments and ritual that proclaim his calling, still his every word and act reveal his relationship with the clod and the lamp. There is no necessity to invest him in motley if there be virtue in his looks naturally, if his body be blown up like Tribouillet's bladder, or his face resemble a ‘ perpetual triumph, an everlasting bonfire ’. There is, moreover, no special need of these if he be openly and palpably irresponsible, and therefore as immune as a lunatic from all the laws of morality and justice. But our mood depends not a little on the knowledge that he is a fool as well as a knave, a butt as well as a bully, that he is these things equally *and therefore undeserving of anger or pity*.

It is impossible to think of a time when clowning will cease to be popular. In our own day we have seen it revived, after its gradual decease in the pantomimic harlequinade, in Pellissier, in Mr Chaplin, in Fatty Arbuckle, in the great Grock, in the drama the clown has reappeared in strange guises. What else is the Duke in *The Admirable Crickton*, or that other Duke in Mr Chesterton's *Magic* ? And what excellent clowning is there in the plays of that dramatist of the intelligentsia, Mr Bernard Shaw. Britannicus in ‘ Caesar and Cleopatra ’ is a bit of a clown, and so is Boxer in ‘ Getting Married ’ ; while there is a perfect piece of clowning, as Mr Disher points out, in ‘ Androcles and the Lion ’. Our enjoyment in the clown is, I think, a form of self-satisfaction. In cruder, more brutal days men found funny, or at least felicitous, the spectacle of their fellows being done to death. Even to-day that horrible temper may sometimes be found. And there are those who argue that our laughter at the thrackings,

## ‘ Here We Are Again ! ’

the falls, the disasters, and the disappointments of clown and buffoon are only refined versions of the laughter that came from the sight of men worried by beasts or tortured elaborately at the stake. This is, I believe, an error. If you ask a child you will nearly always find that he would like to be a clown, and no Roman child ever desired to be a criminal in the arena. The clown gives our sophistication freedom. To a world over occupied with etiquette, with ceremonial, either meaningless or of forgotten meaning, the clown brings a message of freedom. His gallant contempt of the police, his disregard for his own and others' sufferings satisfy in us that craving for adventure which is difficult to get in this world of over regulated towns—though one can get a taste of it in Paris by crossing the Place de la Concorde on a wet night and disregarding the traffic. The clown's freedom is imaginative. His struggles to accomplish his task, his pathetic and frequent failures, his occasional, unexpected, and dazzling successes are a microcosm of our own difficulties, and bank clerks can believe more easily in the prospect of that assistant managership and authors hope once more for those sales reaching tens of thousands. The clown reminds us of the possibility of surprise, of the virtue of the unlikely, of the imminence of the improbable. He is slave to nothing but freedom and whim, and we are slaves to every thing else. The clown is a continuous promise that desire does matter more than anything, that to will greatly is far more than half the battle. He is the spirit of joyous hope. Whether as Grimaldi, or Grock, or Chaplin, he is one of the foolish things of



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the world which are too much for the wise. He is, in his humble way, a part of Catholic Christianity, and advertisement of the incongruity of life; he springs from the same spirit as that which caused the stalls in our churches or ordered the feast of Misrule. He is a hint to cultivate humility. It was a wise man who said that the test of a good joke was whether a child would laugh at it, and the child who will not laugh at the clown is either sick or training to be some kind of Puritan ascetic. When the element of clowning left our literature, as it did for a time, something incalculable departed from it. It is present in Chaucer in a vigorous and rude form, it is present abundantly in Shakespeare, Swift occasionally indulged his sardonic humour in it—but his slap-stick is weighted, there is a lovely clownishness in Lamb, and Hood is the only man of genius and poetry who used the great clown’s tradition of immoderate punning. Dickens is full of clowns, and after Dickens there is a terrible gap. We begin to laugh rationally, and it is only recently that the clown has begun to come back, and he has not quite got used to the new world in which he finds himself. When he does, we may have a new Dickens or even a new Chaucer.

Few professional men work so hard, with such pluck, and with such good heart as the theatrical. And in that world few work harder than the clown and the circus-man. If any doubt this, let them read *My Circus Life* by Mr James Lloyd. Mr Disher tells the tragic story of the loss of Grimaldi’s story of his life, that book ‘ full, frank, and delightfully clownish, childlike, and simple ’ it is an irreparable

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loss, but it may be conjectured that even Grimaldi's book was no better than this volume of Mr Lloyd's. The author has a gift for realistic, straightforward narrative which is almost comparable to Bunyan's, only, unlike that great artist, he has no moral to draw. He just tells how things happened from the day when, at five years of age, he joined Ginnett's travelling circus. There were few parts Mr Lloyd did not undertake. When he was seventeen years old, he had a benefit at Southampton—and his seven turns were

- 1 Richard the Third on horseback.
- 2 Brigands cure Ghost and Old Nick on horseback.
- 3 Comic clown on horseback.
- 4 My principal bare back riding.
- 5 Olympians with W. Ginnett on three horses.
- 6 I did fifty somersaults on the dead ground.
- 7 I represented Shaw the Lifeguardman on horseback.

He worked about sixteen hours a day, and saved money. He had accidents, physical and financial. He was his own master, and was also employed by Hengler. He went with circuses through Ireland, France, Germany, Hungary, Bulgaria, Austria, and the United States. He was nearly married perforce by a Red Indian girl. He has trained animals, and was the first man to take to Ireland the phonograph and the cinematograph. Once he forsook the circus world to run an hotel, but this experiment did not last. He went back to the road. He was born in 1816, and at the end of this book he says ‘ A few more years may come. I will then cast my whip and steed aside and lay me down ’. That is a brave

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sentence for a man of seventy-nine, who since he was four has had a silver plate in his head. Mr Lloyd's is a difficult book to quote from, but here are a few sentences which give something of his quality .

I went to live with my wife's mother at Stratford-on Avon We had at that time five children. One had the measles I put the four others with her who had the complaint They all had the measles together It saved a lot of bother

We visited Detroit, Michigan. It was the first time We got there in a cyclone I hope it will be the last. It came about 6 30 We could see it coming towards the show ground It struck all the tents, which were destroyed, all but the animal tent An hour afterwards a waterspout fell within two hundred yards from the ground. It was a good job it missed the menagerie tent Had the lions and tigers got loose there would have been a fearful catastrophe It was a nice sight to see the cyclone, but not the effects

*My Circus Life* should not be missed by anyone who wants to get the tang of life and hard work at first hand

## The Trivial Round



IT is over a hundred years ago since the Rev John Keble wrote his morning hymn. Published in *The Christian Year*, it, and many other of the verses in that collection, profoundly influenced the ideas and ambitions of many people not ordinarily susceptible to literary influences and the ideals he praised and followed did much towards forming the tradition which we know as Victorian.

If on our daily course our mind  
Be set to hallow all we find  
Now treasures still, of countless price,  
God will provide for sacrifice

The trivial round, the common task,  
Will furnish all we need to ask,  
Room to deny ourselves, a road  
To bring us daily nearer God

His second verse is often quoted without the first, as evidence of Keble's ignorance of psychology. That is very unfair. Plainly enough he knew, as well as any modern, how supremely dull the repeated commonplace of daily life could be, unless it was alleviated and illuminated by a higher vision, a supernatural hope. In fact, the verses, read properly, are the precise opposite of what they are often taken to be. They are, not an encomium on life's little worries, they are a confession of the tiresomeness and futility of the repetition of trivial duties, and an

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indication of how that tiresomeness and futility can be cured. Keble, though he must have deprecated his language, was in full agreement with the sombre humorist who complained that 'Life was one dam' thing after another', only he had a vision which transformed for him and those who accepted his gospel the dreariness of obliged duty into the ecstasy of voluntary love.

Since his day the Christian year has largely become unchristian, but although Keble's incentive has been lost by so many of us, his necessity still oppresses. Of that oppression modern literature—since Swinburne and Gissing, say—is full, and recent American literature seems full of nothing else. Nearly all the younger American authors are disappointed romantics and one of the most disappointed, and the most skilful in picturing the disappointment of his characters is Mr Sherwood Anderson. It is a pity that an English publisher, suffering from that foolish tradition that a book of short stories is not a book, should have chosen Mr Anderson's novel *Poor White* with which to introduce him to the English public. *Poor White* has merits; but it is a dull, shapeless, and over written story. Mr Anderson's true medium is the short story, and the descriptive sketch and in *The Triumph of the Egg* we find some really brilliant work. We forget, over here, that America is largely still a pioneer country, and it is good that a school of Western authors is reminding us of that. Mr. Lewis, Mr Anderson, Mr MacAlmon are all writing about people who still have, to a large extent, to live the pioneer life, and have no longer the nerves nor the faith which can make pioneer life tolerable.

## The Trivial Round

Putting aside all questions of creed, and treating it purely as a problem in metaphysical values, isn't it evident that a man or woman whose ambition is to go to the nearest town to see the 'movies' is less likely to stand the continuous hardship and boredom of pioneer life than a man or woman whose one ambition is to go to heaven and enjoy the Beatific Vision? All the people in *The Triumph of the Egg* are bored to the verge of mental breakdown. The boy in *The Egg* harps dolefully on the deadly sameness of the poultry farm:

One unversed in such matters can have no notion of the many and tragic things that can happen to a chicken. It is born out of an egg, lives for a few weeks as a tiny fluffy thing such as you will see pictured on Easter cards, then becomes hideously naked, eats quantities of corn and meal bought by the sweat of your father's brow, gets discases called pip, cholera and other names, stands looking with stupid eyes at the sun, becomes sick and dies. A few hens and now and then a rooster, intended to serve God's mysterious ends, struggle through to maturity. The hens lay eggs out of which come other chickens and the dreadful cycle is thus made complete.

The father in this tale finds his amusement in preserving in spirits of wine the monstrosities of his farm, chicks with two heads or four legs or two pairs of wings. Life for all of them is a round of consistent pain, lightened only by the chance of one day being rich enough to buy pleasures which only inexperience makes them believe to be any less monotonously boring than the pain of work. Other characters take refuge in day dreams, like the man in *The Other Woman*, who snatches, just before his marriage, at

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the romance of gay living. Others find a shallow refuge in lying, like the old man in *Brothers*, who claims relationship with figures of notorious criminal cases or with world celebrities. All are savagely or sullenly aware of the monotony of life, of its dreadful usualness, of the desperate persistence of sleep and waking, and none of them have any sure way of escape. They look to nature and they see

A great pancake of cowdung. It was covered with grey dust and over it crawled shiny black beetles. They were rolling the dung into balls in preparation for the germination of the new generation of beetles.

They turn to family life and note that 'for several generations the Leanders had all lived on the same farm and had all married thin women'. They turn to sex as it is expressed in *Venus Pandemos*, and all that it brings them is the admission made by Rosalind in *Out of Nowhere into Nothing*: 'If the sex impulse had been gratified in what way would my problem be solved? I am lonely now. It is evident that after that had happened I would still be lonely.' They turn to patriotism and deplore that 'death only resides in the conquering whites and that life remains in the red men who are gone'.

Inevitably the tone of this book and of others as full of disillusionment make us wonder as to the future of the United States. It is a commonplace of history now that the French Revolution was conceived in the works of Rousseau and Voltaire; and we are too near to forget how the Russian Revolution was preceded by the cynical pessimism of Artibasher. The American pessimists are not

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cynical Their despair is less intellectual than that of the Nihilists But they have no solution to offer for the dullness of life Is there a chance, I wonder, that they may return to the Christian Year? For whether you call it dope, or whether you believe it to be the pattern of the supernatural, some religion we must have The mass of mankind will never, without it, be reconciled to the drudgery of existence



## Friday to Tuesday



**I**T will rain of a week-end. I do not mean that it rains steadily, all over England, from Friday night to Monday afternoon. That is a vain invention, bruted abroad by Americans who come from a country where it never rains, but tornadoes, typhoons, and hurricanes. No, what I mean is, that if you live in the country, and ask your friends from London to come and see you for a 'week-end'—Friday to Tuesday—then it rains. Particularly and more petulantly will it rain if you planned, in rash confidence, any sort of outdoor festivity—lawn tennis parties, river expeditions, picnics. It may clear up—it is peculiarly liable to be bright and sunny while you are in church on Sunday morning; but the chances of a good deal of wet weather during a week end party are very high. One odd fact I do not pretend to explain. When I lived in London and visited friends in the country I had far fewer wet week-ends than I now have as a host. Well, when it rains, something has to be done to devise entertainment for the guests. In the winter it is not difficult. Any humanly constituted, discreet man can get sufficient entertainment in letting the fire go out while he sits beside it and reads papers or books, and all the women can get a superior excitement by running in and saying in tones of breathless reproof and suppressed enjoyment, 'Oh, you men have let the fire out again!' (Please notice that I am not writing of week-ends in houses with large

## Friday to Tuesday

staffs of servants, where you can ring a bell and have the fire made up for you. If your visit is to that kind of house, you can always amuse yourself by trying to find the way to your room by approaching it up the secondary, tertiary, or quaternary staircase.) But a wet week end in the summer time! Somehow most of the winter amusements seem unseasonable. You can of course, start an argument about whether any men really prefer 'Contract' Bridge to plain Auction' Bridge, and why so many women do, whether Skat is really the supreme game its players boast, or whether it was wetter and colder the last June you spent in looking for the sun on the Cote d'Azur or in Cornwall. In fact you can continue much as you would have done had you not come away—but the specific holiday note will be missing. A good deal of fun can be got out of alienating the affections of your hostess's kitten, but that may not make you popular. In most houses some one will have to find a solution of the problem, but where are we to get a solution which will fit nearly all cases of the wet week end?

There is one provided by the diligence and ingenuity of Miss Vera Mendel, Mr Francis Meynell, and Mr John Goss. It is an admirable help, *The Week End Book*. It is, first of all, an anthology, and what is more conducive to conversation than an anthology? Anthologies are as fruitful a source of conversation as of income, and this anthology is rather a dream as a peg for disquisition. After all he is a bold man who, on a dull morning, will break into a circle of disappointed loafers with some such sentence as, 'Don't you think Q's Oxford Book is very good—or

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very bad?' or, 'Was it not frightfully stupid of Mrs. Miles not to include poems on second childhood in her anthology?' but it needs no courage to step up with this gay little volume, and say, 'I say! Have you seen *The Week-End Book*? The editors are frightfully ingenious'—or 'dreadfully stupid.' Or, 'It's really not a bad little book, only they've left out young Thaddeus Trasher, and that gay thing of Benson Blurge's "*The Stinkless Skunk*," isn't in.' That is, I'm afraid, the way critics always receive anthologies. I've got one or two sentences of that kind ready for this one, but first let me describe its plan. *The Week-End Book* is divided into eight sections. Of these, five are anthologies, and three are aids to the merriment and simplicity of life. The anthologies are Great Poems, Hate Poems, State Poems, The Zoo, and Songs. The aids are accounts of, and suggestions for, games, an excellent series of hints on food and drinks, and a section of medical notes for extricating the guest (or host) from accidents and other predicaments.

The songs are printed with their music, here Mr John Goss is responsible. There are more soldier songs and less old songs than I would wish. What is a week-end without 'The Golden Vanity'? Mr Goss gives, however, many lovely things—some of the best negro spirituals—though I miss 'Nobody Knows the Troubles I've Seen'—and some entrancing rounds and folk-songs. This section alone would help pass much wet weather.

The four anthologies of poems—Great, Hate and State, and the Zoo—are full of delightful things. I wish the editors could have given us a little prose

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as well. For instance, to Whitman's bold generalization about animals might have been appended Maurice Hewlett's note that, after all, we don't know whether the animals are dissatisfied or not. In the section 'Great Poems' the editors have rightly and deliberately avoided the stock anthology pieces and the usual anthology periods. So we have much more of the seventeenth century than of the eighteenth or nineteenth, and a very desirable amount of modern work by living authors. I cannot quite reconcile myself to the absence of Mr. de la Mare from the last category; and he has done some lovely things which demand inclusion in the Zoo. Boldly the compilers have inserted extracts from the Holy Bible, only those unacquainted with modern ignorance of the Bible will object to this, though it was perhaps a slightly undergraduate flippancy which made them put Mr Ewer's quatrain immediately after Deborah's song. The Great Poems are not all great in one way, but each is, I think, excellent in its own way—from John Still's 'Jolly Good Ale' to Francis Thompson's splendid 'From the Night of Forebeing'. I have only one general criticism to make of this section. I should have liked more narrative poems; and there should have been something of Mr. Vachel Lindsey's, a most admirably sociable poet. I have known one week end saved by that bard from utter disaster.

There are entertaining things in Hate Poems and State Poems (may I suggest for a subsequent edition, a section of 'Late Poems'—bits of Robert Pollok, of Martin Tupper, of T. H. Bayley?), but after the Great Poems I prefer The Zoo. Here is Ralph

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Hodgson's fierce and vehement 'Hymn to Moloch', here Miss Meynell's 'Jonah' (but not Mr. Aldous Huxley's), here Blake's 'Tyger' (how could Mr Meynell pass the commonplace spelling Tiger?), Chesterton's lovely 'Song of Quoodle', Mr. Munro's 'Milk for the Cat', Marjorie Fleming's 'Sonnet to a Monkey'. Here, too, is a poem, new to me, of Mr Francis Meynell's, 'Beasts and Men', of which I must quote the last two verses.

Yet horse and sheep tread leaf and stem  
And bud and flower beneath their feet,  
They sniff at Stars of Bethlehem  
And buttercups are food to them—  
No more than bitter food or sweet.

I, to whom air and waves are scaled,  
I yet possess the human part.  
O better beasts, you now must yield!  
I name the cool stars of the field,  
I have the flowers of heaven by heart.

I have left myself but little space to praise the good notes on games, on food and drink, and on medicaments. The doctor who provides these last is no bigot, as may be judged from the end of his advice about syncope (fainting):

It is pleasant and fitting that the patient celebrate the first moment when he is able to stand upright by partaking of a fluid ounce of brandy or whisky. *Sal Volatile* should not be withheld on grounds of principle.

The uses of the book are not exhausted when it has been read through. One end-paper is a draught-board and a measurer (in inches and millimetres);

## Friday to Tuesday

the other a board for 'Nine Men s Morris' At the end of the book are blank pages wherein each owner may inscribe poems, songs, recipes, games, and prescriptions I have promptly added two poems in my copy—one old English, the other old American They are called respectively 'Despondency' and 'Humble Achievement'

The primrose blooms beneath the hill  
The violet from the brake looks up  
The cowslip and the daffodil  
And, what is worse, *the buttercup*!

And then 'Humble Achievement', with its quaint eighteenth century sub title, 'A comparison of the dingier insects of creation with those which flaunt colour, speed or brilliance, intended as a consolation for the low spirited' It was written, I believe, in Salem, Massachusetts, and it runs

The dragon fly has wings of blue,  
The fire fly wings of flame  
The bed bug has no wings at all  
But gets there just the same!

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